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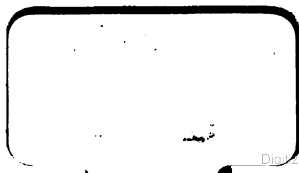


# *Duties and duties*

Agnes Giberne, American Sunday-School Union



600057850V





51





‘Annis entered slowly, with her black crape veil down.’—Page 89.

# DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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JANUARY 1, 1900





# DUTIES AND DUTIES

A Tale

BY

AGNES GIBERNE

AUTHOR OF 'THE UPWARD GAZE,' 'SUN, MOON, AND STARS,'  
'THE CURATE'S HOME,' ETC.

' Only, O Lord, in Thy dear love  
Fit us for perfect rest above ;  
And help us this and every day  
To live more nearly as we pray.'

CHRISTIAN YEAR



SEELEY, JACKSON, & HALLIDAY, 54, FLEET STREET  
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## P R E F A C E.

---

IN the writing of this little tale I have had a somewhat difficult task. Annis Dermot represents, or is intended to represent, a certain class of professing Christians, whose Christianity appears to be not only a profession but a matter of the heart, whose faith, it seems, does work by love, only it is a contracted love issuing in ill-balanced work.

Some, on reading the book, may be disposed to exclaim : ' Annis a child of God ! Impossible ! ' But we have to beware how we pass hasty judgment in such cases. Looking on from outside, we cannot weigh the strength of temptation, the weakness of understanding, the frailty of will, the injudicious teaching received, which may

result in some such defects, alongside with a true albeit sickly life in the soul.

On the other hand, there is danger in overleniency. I have a fear lest any words of mine should seem to countenance a low and careless level of Christian life, by too earnestly insisting that the same is undoubtedly real in its measure. How far self-deception may reach, how far the spurious may be taken for the true by the most experienced eye, are questions hard to answer. I have painted Annis as one who thoroughly believed herself to be a child of God, and who was in the long-run believed to be so by those about her, despite her many failures. I do not, as author, attempt absolutely to decide the question for Annis Dermot which I could not absolutely decide for such a character in real life. I have simply pictured—faithfully to the best of my power—that which I believe to be a certain phase of life, not seldom seen in the present day, leaving the said picture to speak for itself. If I have in any degree overdrawn, I am—not sorry, but glad. Would that it were so, and

that none *such* soldiers might be found in the camp of our Captain !

Some may be disposed to blame any effort to bring these failures into notice, as a step likely to place weapons in the hands of opponents.

I do not see the matter so. I am sure we shall never gain ground in the great battle against evil, by ignoring weaknesses which exist on our side. No wise general will shut his own eyes, or will strive to blind the eyes of his garrison, to the vulnerable part of the castle wall. Rather he will bestow double attention there, in his desire to render the whole impregnable.

And if we do not speak, keen-eyed opponents will speak—not to us perhaps, but among themselves. The servant of God, and the professing servant of God, will be judged by them, not in respect of his profession, his works, his intentions, but simply in respect of his LIFE. It is not a matter of a good deed here or a kindness there, of these words spoken or that address given—but of the entire life : life in the home as well as out of the home ; life with parents, brothers, sisters, as well

as with acquaintances and fellow-workers. *There* is where we succeed or fail. *There* is where we honour or dishonour our Lord. The only opinion which such opponents can form upon the religion of Christ—nay, upon Christ Himself—is gathered from the daily lives of His followers. How far could any true view of Christ be gained by one who knew Him not, from the life of an Annis Dermot? It is a grave question. At the best the vision would be one sorely blurred and misty.

EASTBOURNE,  
1880.

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# DUTIES AND DUTIES.



## CHAPTER I.

ANNIS DERMOT.

‘Tired, Aunt Selina?’ asked Annis Dermot, in a tone of cheerful inquiry, at the sound of a sigh.

A second and more profoundly-drawn breath was the only reply.

‘Two and sixpence—three and ninepence—four and sixpence,’ murmured Annis. ‘We must have the doctor to see you, Auntie, if you feel poorly.’

‘Doctors never do anything for me,’ Miss Randolph answered, in a voice neither captious nor complaining, but certainly tinged with gloom.

The clock ticked busily for some minutes, undisturbed by further remarks. It was a cosy little country drawing-room in which the two ladies sat,

with a touch of the primly-decorous in the arrangement of chairs and ornaments. Everest Cottage, which despite its unpretending humility of title was a well-built and substantial house, plainly owned to the disturbing influences of no children. Certain aged though well-kept volumes in handsome binding lay upon the round table, as they might have lain for thirty years past, pointing towards the centre vase with the regularity of spokes in a wheel. Two low chiffoniers, glass-fronted and rigidly plain in make, flanked the fire-place, containing rows of old-fashioned brown and green books, which nobody ever dreamt of reading. A rather uninviting sofa, belonging to that debatable period, the productions of which can be called neither modern nor antique, stood against the wall, and was well matched by most of the remaining furniture.

Annis Dermot, a young lady of five or six and twenty years, small, slim, pale, with a pair of positive lips and restless self-conscious eyes—pretty eyes too, and capable of wearing a particularly sweet expression when their possessor willed—sat in the bow-window at a davenport, writing. The window opened upon a well-kept garden, beyond which lay a road leading to the village.

Near the fire-place, with its elaborately cut green and white paper 'apron,' an elderly lady occupied an easy-chair. In appearance she was tall, and so thin as to be almost gaunt, with a square firm jaw, sallow complexion, and peculiarly grave eyes. She wore black mittens, though it was a warm August day, and had a three-cornered knitted grey shawl over her shoulders.

Certain infirmities, rather of illness than of age, had been creeping over Miss Randolph during the past three or four years, and the once active benefactor of the parish found herself gradually condemned to a life of inaction and suffering. No one knew exactly what was wrong with her. The country practitioner, summoned at long intervals, talked of careful diet, and prescribed various medicines which left her as they found her. Friends whispered that she showed 'signs of failing.' But Annis was not anxious.

Since the age of eight years Annis Dermot had been the adopted child of her mother's cousin, Miss Randolph, and had known no other home than Everest Cottage. Mr. and Mrs. Dermot had agreed to give up their eldest little girl, at a time of great pecuniary pressure, on condition that she should be provided for through life. Miss Randolph was well

able to make and to fulfil this promise. The plan had seemed at the time in many respects desirable, and whatever the reluctance felt by Annis' parents, they had consented to it—though not till after long and persevering efforts on the part of Miss Randolph to bend them to her will.

For a while after this arrangement, Annis' visits to her proper home had been regular, though not frequent. But Miss Randolph's aim, steadily followed out albeit scarcely confessed even to herself, to loosen the ties which bound Annis to her parents and sisters, could hardly fail of success. Long before this she had gained her point. Through ten years past, intercourse between Annis and her nearest relatives had been very fitful, and four years had elapsed since her last visit at home. Miss Randolph's health formed the excuse, and in some measure a valid excuse. Annis certainly owed her every daughterly care. But, on the other hand, Annis did not care to go home.

'It is a lovely day,' she said presently, after stooping over her davenport and writing. She used her pen quickly, but apparently not with great ease, judging from her frequent pauses and puzzled frowns. 'I almost think you might manage a turn in the garden, Auntie.' Though in reality Miss

Randolph's first cousin once removed, Annis always gave her the title of Aunt.

'Perhaps I might,' said Miss Randolph seriously. She had a singularly serious and even solemn demeanour. People were apt to say that Miss Randolph thought it wrong to smile, and undoubtedly she gave some reason for this surmise. The gloom was in reality owing to natural disposition, not to principle, though of course a good many were disposed to saddle her religion with the burden of it. On the other hand, there were many who, knowing the real tenderness of heart and Christian self-forgetfulness which lay beneath this unattractive manner, would not hear a word in her dispraise. To Annis she had ever been the embodiment of motherly love and sympathy. Annis rarely had smiles from her, but she had everything else that she needed. She neither expected nor missed the smiles.

'I certainly think it would do you good,' said Annis, dipping her pen anew into the inkstand. 'Bennet can give you her arm.'

'Bennet has gone home for the afternoon.'

Annis looked up quickly. 'Gone home! Why, she never asked my leave.'

'No; she said you were not at hand, so she came

to me. I told her I was sure there could be no objection.' Miss Randolph spoke with a grain of hesitation, as if not quite certain how her words would be taken. 'She had a message to say that her mother was not well.'

'She could have gone in the evening. Very wrong of Bennet,' said Annis, with a brow rumped all over. 'I have given her such particular orders not to tease you with questions about household affairs. But she is always trying to get her own way.'

'I don't think that was her reason, my dear, really,' said Miss Randolph.

'Well—it is tiresome,' repeated Annis. 'I wish I could offer you my arm, Auntie, but I have all these Sunday School lesson notes to copy. I must send them off early to-morrow. And I am expecting Mr. Fenton too. He said he should look in early this afternoon. Perhaps, after all, the walking would tire you more than it would do you good. Sitting there you get plenty of air with no fatigue. I could pull your chair a little nearer the window if you liked. Oh! there comes Mr. Fenton.'

Annis sprang up with evident pleasure, as a gentleman in clerical dress came to the window, which opened low in French style, and could be entered without difficulty. He seemed to be not far from

forty years old, with a spare sunburnt face, wiry frame, and frank blunt manners.

‘How do you do? Quite well, eh? How do you do, Miss Randolph? Better?—ah, that’s right.’ Miss Randolph had not said so, but he took the reply for granted. ‘Splendid weather. First-rate harvest this year, if it keeps up. Busy—busy—busy, Miss Dermot—busy as usual, I see,’—and he pointed to the davenport. ‘Up to the eyes in business.’

‘Annis always has so much in hand,’ said Miss Randolph. ‘She is an active worker.’

‘Dear Auntie, not more than you have been,’ said Annis. ‘Have you not trained me to it? Besides, one is so much happier for plenty of work—don’t you think so, Mr. Fenton?’

Annis was on very friendly terms with the two-years vicar of Collins Mead. He was a good and earnest man, having his heart thoroughly in his work, and he found Annis Dermot a valuable coadjutor. He was not married, and though the village was large and the parish extensive, neither village nor parish contained many ladies alike able and willing to devote their time to the needs of the poor. Annis was eager, capable, enterprising, ready for anything. She found her parish occupa-



tions undoubtedly somewhat more fascinating under the superintendence of Mr. Fenton, than under the non-superintendence of the superannuated old gentleman who had preceded him. Work, always abundant, had of late acquired a new zest.

People said 'something' would infallibly come of it. Many of the poor in the parish, who dearly loved 'Miss Dermot,' and who were learning more and more to appreciate Mr. Fenton, despite the occasional bluntness of his rebukes, would have been delighted if that 'something' had come.

But there was at present no sign of the thing—not even the shadow of such an event cast beforehand. Mr. Fenton found Annis exceedingly useful, and he had fallen into the habit of making her his perpetual referee; while Annis greatly liked him, and enjoyed intercourse with him. The idea of marriage, in connection with Annis Dermot, had never even entered Mr. Fenton's head. If Annis were in any degree 'touched,' she did not herself know it.

'Can't have too much work,' said Mr. Fenton. 'The more the better. I pity idle folks with all my heart. Everything goes wrong with them. They are a prey to *ennui*—victims to nervous disorders—

life becomes a burden—nothing is as they wish it to be.’

‘My active days are numbered,’ said Miss Randolph.

‘Not a bit—not necessarily, I mean. Don’t be downhearted,’ said Mr. Fenton, with his extra-cheerful air. ‘Lying by for a while does nobody any harm. God calls us to it now and then—gives us time to think. We busy folks are in danger of losing sight of the need for thought—in danger of getting to be like ships without ballast. I find the inclination in myself. Here, there, everywhere—a high-pressure rush to keep down accumulations of business—and away goes meditation. Not good or healthy, Miss Randolph. The soul can’t thrive upon it. So then maybe one has to sit still for a while—to sit and think. Well, well, Miss Dermot, I told you I meant to look in this afternoon. I suppose you have not found time yet to draw up those papers——’

Annis held out a small roll.

‘You really have? You don’t say so! Now we shall get on swimmingly. There are one or two little matters on which I want to consult you.’

Mr. Fenton took possession of a chair, and a brisk conversation followed, one question after

another passing under review. He deferred greatly to Annis' judgment. She had lived in Collins Mead nearly all her life, was acquainted with everybody, and knew every detail of everybody's circumstances. Four years earlier he would have gone just as readily to Miss Randolph for information. But he had come to Collins Mead only in time to find the thirty-years benefactor of the parish pressed by ill-health into the background, and Annis Dermot stepping into her place.

Miss Randolph sat and listened with interest, yet she was overpowered by an undefinable sense of sadness. Not that she found anything to object to in the conversation. It was pure 'business' from first to last. Mr. Fenton was unmistakably and undisguisedly wrapped up in the engrossing nature of his work, in the absorbing claims of a wide and long-neglected parish. Never was any man less lover-like. He merely made use of Annis as a necessary item in the said work, and his very intimacy with her only produced an added air of bluntness. A tendency to *brusquerie* was one of this good man's natural failings, and he was himself only half aware of the failing.

As for Annis, Miss Randolph felt by no means so sure. There was a certain air of excitement about

her when in Mr. Fenton's company, which Miss Randolph had noticed of late. She saw it again this day with an uneasy feeling.

'I will go at once,' she heard suddenly, and Annis sprang up, rapid as usual in movement. 'Auntie, one of the boys was very naughty in school to-day, and no one can do anything with him. You didn't hear, did you, what we were saying? Ah, I thought not. They are afraid he has been stealing apples, and I am going to try to bring him to a confession.'

'There are the Fosters, too,' said Mr. Fenton.

'O yes, I will call there. And while I am about it, I may as well glance through the school library. So many of the books want repairing or covering. I must put them aside.'

Miss Randolph knew what this implied. Once in the school and among the poor, Annis never knew how time went. She ventured to suggest :

'You have copying to do, Annis. Would not another day serve for the calls?'

'I can write after tea. O no, I will get them done at once. Better not put off.'

'Don't let me take you out if you ought to be in,' said Mr. Fenton, looking at the davenport. 'Duty may lie there.'

'Duty lies just now with Jackie Sturt and the Fosters,' said Annis gaily. 'Duties never clash, you know—do they, Auntie?'

'People say not,' Miss Randolph answered absently.

'And you think they do. O Auntie! Auntie! But I must get my hat. You say you are going to the school, Mr. Fenton?'

'Yes. If you have anything more to say to me, it may as well be on the road thither,' said Mr. Fenton, looking at his watch—for he had come to Collins Mead straight from a curacy in a large manufacturing town, and was accustomed to husband his minutes.

'Oh, that will do nicely. Yes, I did want to consult you about one of the boys in my Tuesday evening class. He is very difficult to manage, and makes the others naughty, yet I can't bear to banish him.'

'Dicks, I suppose?'

'The very one. You have had to do with him before. But I must not wait.'

Annis hurried lightly away, and Miss Randolph looked after her, with a murmur of, 'Dear girl!'

'Miss Dermot is an extraordinarily active member of society,' remarked Mr. Fenton. 'She never

seems to weary of helping others. Quite a rebuke to the women of the day.' Mr. Fenton had rather a poor idea of the sex in general.

'She is very much beloved, I am sure,' said Miss Randolph's solemn tones.

'Ah, don't talk to me about that,' quaintly responded Mr. Fenton. 'I am too well aware of the fact. If I want to get home in time for dinner, and don't wish to find my mutton chop cold, I just avoid mentioning Miss Dermot's name for half an hour beforehand. Very delightful to see. She takes it all with simplicity too.'

'I am only afraid sometimes that perhaps she undertakes—just a little—too much.'

'You think so? I am sorry for that. Mustn't let her overdo herself, must we? Really, I don't see in what quarter she is to be spared. But if she finds any work too heavy, she must just let me know. As she truly remarked, duties never clash. Her duty is to take care of her health; therefore, it can't be her duty to throw her health away.'

Mr. Fenton liked his own form of expression so well that he made a mental note of it for future use in a corner of his brain. Sometimes he gave practical lectures on everyday life to his parishioners.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE RIGHT AND THE WRONG.

MISS RANDOLPH had not meant any reference to Annis' health. She did not, however, attempt any explanation of her own rather indefinite idea. Mr. Fenton's words had set her off on a fresh tack, and she asked :

'Do you think duties never clash? I used to say the same. I am not so sure—now.'

'There is always one paramount duty,' said Mr. Fenton. 'The paramount duty is *the* duty for the moment. Lesser claims, incompatible with it, are, in fact, no duties at all. It can't possibly be my duty, for instance, to walk north and to walk south at the same time.'

'Both might look to you like your duty.'

'Perhaps so—perhaps so. That would be because of my blindness. Then I must pray for enlightenment. But that both should be my duty is not possible. My duty is to do God's will—and the

will of God can't point in two directions at once. There may be no end of claims south, but if the will of God is that I should walk north, there lies my plain duty, and I have nothing whatever to do with the south.'

'You seem very clear in your mind about it,' said Miss Randolph, with the faint twitch of her lips which was the nearest approach she ever made to a smile. 'Very clear and positive. Things used to look just as clear to me. But now—thinking over my past life—sometimes I get perplexed.'

'You may have taken a wrong turning here and there. That does not show any real clashing of duties, but only a mistaken understanding on your part.'

Miss Randolph was silent for some seconds.

'About Annis,' she said, at length. 'This is strictly confidential, if you please. Surely it was my duty to train her up for heaven—to guard her from all possible temptations and dangers.'

'Decidedly.'

'Yes, so I have always felt. And yet—have I been quite right to separate her from her family as I have done?'

Mr. Fenton made no answer.

'I never had any doubts till lately. At least, I



do not remember having them. Annis was given up to me completely. I stipulated for that, and I would not have had her on any other conditions. It may have seemed a little hard at the time, but I had my reasons. My longing was to bring her up to a life of service to God, and I knew her family to be worldly and gay—I knew her parents' influence would be exactly opposed to mine. I always thought separation the safest plan—if not the only plan. They might have led her astray.'

'Separation to what extent?'

'It has grown. Letters are exchanged occasionally—not often. Annis has not been home now for four years.'

'H'm!' said Mr. Fenton. 'Let her go next week.'

'I don't know how to spare her. She is very necessary to me. I don't see much of her in the day—so much as I could wish—but still she manages everything.'

♦ 'True. She is an excellent manager. Why not ask her family here?'

'Her sisters? I might. I will think it over. Mr. Fenton, what is your opinion? Have I been right?'

She was conscience-tossed, memory-worried, and wanted a soothing word.

‘You seriously believed the line of action you chose to be your duty, Miss Randolph. At the worst, it was a mistake. Your wish to guard against worldly influences was perfectly right. Perhaps the manner of doing so has been pushed too far.’

‘That was partly my reason, at any rate. But I have had painful doubts, painful heart-searchings lately. Annis’ influence might have been for good over her sisters. Had I a right to prevent such influence?’

She looked earnestly in Mr. Fenton’s face with her heavy eyes, round which the flesh had sunk into deep and shadowed hollows.

‘To break off natural ties has a serious sound,’ he said abruptly. ‘There ought to be a very plain leading of God’s Providence. But you meant it all for the best.’

‘Did I? I thought so. I am not so sure now. I meant to make her mine—mine only.’

The confession seemed to drop irresistibly, as if impelled by some inward force. She put her mittened hands up to her face, breathed hard, and said:

‘You think me wrong?’

‘I beg your pardon. It is a difficult question—

perhaps one that you alone can decide for yourself, on your knees before God. There may be no great wisdom in your looking back, and weighing pros and cons, except as an aid for deciding in the future. I should certainly be disposed to make a change now. Whatever the danger may once have been, you scarcely need fear home influences any longer for Miss Dermot. We may rather hope, as you suggest, that her influence at home would work good. But we can talk more about this some other day,—for he had detected Annis' returning step.

Miss Randolph did not look satisfied. Wisely or unwisely, she had been haunted by this subject for many days past. She thought Mr. Fenton shrank from expressing the disapproval which he felt, and her burden weighed upon her the more heavily in consequence.

Annis did not notice the cloud over her spirits, plainly enough shown in manner. With a cheery farewell to her aunt, she preceded Mr. Fenton out of the room, and Miss Randolph resigned herself to live wearily through the afternoon. She was in pain, and far from well, but whatever her sense of loneliness, she rarely uttered a word of complaint.

The walk to the school proved not too long for the consultation about the refractory lad in Annis' class. Smiling and nodding to the children, she entered there, as one at home, assured of a welcome. The schoolmistress seemed well relieved to hand over a small stolid boy to the visitor for treatment, her own having failed. Annis led the child to a retired corner, made him sit down beside her on a bench, and entered into a long low-toned conversation with him, her face taking its sweetest and most persuasive look, while Johnnie's remained fixed in stubborn defiance. That changed gradually. Annis' pleading proved irresistible, and presently the red lips quivered, and the dusty little coat-sleeve was rubbed backwards and forwards over the blue eyes, with a muttered, 'I won't be naughty again.'

'But you have been naughty, Johnnie, have you not—very naughty? You took the apples?'

Johnnie gulped out a spasmodic—'Yes.'

'What do you think you deserve for doing it, Johnnie? Do you know you might be sent to prison for stealing? Think how sorry your mother would be. And that isn't the worst. Think how it grieves the Lord Jesus when He sees you doing so wrongly. I wonder if it makes you unhappy to think that He is sorry?'

Mr. Fenton, passing through the room somewhat later, smiled approvingly at the sight of Annis leading a weeping little boy by the hand. She beckoned to him, and he came to learn that Johnnie had confessed, and was 'very sorry,' and 'wouldn't do it no more.' Needful admonitions followed, and Johnnie was finally sent back to the schoolmistress.

'That is good,' Mr. Fenton said. 'You have gained an influence over the child.'

'I hope to use it wisely,' said Annis seriously. 'He really is warm-hearted, when one can break through the obstinate crust outside. Poor little man—he seems now thoroughly penitent. Are you engaged, or can you look at the school library with me for a few minutes?'

'I am quite at your service for half an hour,' was the response; and if the half-hour grew into nearly an hour, neither was aware of the fact. Fresh books were needed, and Annis eagerly promised to ask Miss Randolph for a donation, secure of having no refusal.

'What would Collins Mead do without you both, I wonder?' asked the grateful vicar, as he bade her good-bye.

Annis smiled in answer, and proceeded to a row of cottages, not far from the school, where visits

were due. A family of Fosters had to be remonstrated with on the irregularity of the children's attendance at school, and a wise and gentle reminder was bestowed. It was taken in good part, and lavish promises of improvement were the result.

Next door, a pale-faced woman, Mrs. Fleet by name, gave Annis welcome, with the air of one who had been on the look-out.

'I have been expecting you every day this week, Miss Dermot,' she said. 'I *did* feel to want a word with you so.'

'Why did you not send and ask me to come, Mrs. Fleet? You know I would do so at any time if I were really wanted.'

'Yes, yes, I know, Miss Dermot. Nobody as knows you could ever doubt your kindness. But you've a deal to do—that's where it is. I couldn't disturb you—though I *did* wish you would look in.'

'What has been the matter, Mrs. Fleet? Come, sit down and tell me all about it,' said Annis kindly, taking a seat herself. 'Has anything troubled you?'

The woman's downcast eyes filled. 'Yes, I'm troubled, Miss Dermot—sorely,' she said. 'Not by anybody about me, but by myself. I've had it on me three days past, thinking how things

are with me, and dreading the thoughts of death.'

'Ah,' Annis said, her face lighting up; 'then the *best* has come to you that could have come. You have just begun to learn your need of a Saviour, Mrs. Fleet.'

'I shouldn't wonder but that's it,' said Mrs. Fleet. 'Only I'm not fit——'

'Not fit to be saved? Yes, you are, if you are a sinner. Jesus came to save *sinners*,' said Annis earnestly.

'I'm that, sure enough. But I don't seem as if I could get hold of Him. I've tried and can't.'

'Never mind. Wait at His feet, and *He* will get hold of *you*,' said Annis. 'That is better still, for He will never let you go. Shall you and I read a little together about the way to come to Him?'

Annis' pocket-Bible came out, and it was scarcely surprising that time passed rapidly, as she looked out text after text, reading each in succession, and trying to make their meaning more clear.

'It has been *such* a help,' Mrs. Fleet said, when they rose, and Annis sped on her way, conscious of having left a ray of sunlight behind her.

\* \* \* \* \*

But the ray of sunlight did not reach to Everest

Cottage, where a lonely invalid looked out for Annis' return. The hours passed slowly, and half-past six had struck, and the tea-things had been waiting on the table for nearly half an hour, when Annis at length reappeared, looking extremely happy.

'I have had such a pleasant delightful time, Auntie,' she said, pulling off her hat, and dropping down on an ottoman. 'Mr. Fenton and I had quite a long consultation over the library, and we find fresh books are very much wanted. I told him I would ask you for a little help. I thought perhaps you would give two or three pounds. Then I had a talk with poor little Johnnie, till he was quite softened, and confessed how naughty he had been. And I went to three or four cottages, for it struck me that next week would be so very busy that I had really better get ahead with some of my visits. I had u ch a nice chat with Mrs. Fleet. Do you know, Auntie, I really *do* think that poor woman is anxious about herself, and longing to find peace. I spoke to her a great deal, and read her some verses, and prayed with her. Isn't it a comfort—isn't it a delight—to see people really touched, and to be able to help them! Oh, there can be nothing so well worth living for!'



‘I am glad you have had a nice afternoon,’ said Miss Randolph, rather feebly.

Annis sat musing for full five minutes, swinging her hat gently by the strings, and gazing out of the window, with a smile now and then flitting over her face.

‘And then there are the Smiths,’ she said. ‘John Smith, you know, who used to be so rude to you years ago, and would not let you go into his cottage. He is quite different now. I had a hearty welcome from him to-day, and his wife said——’

‘Would you mind telling me the rest while you make the tea? I feel a little faint, I think.’

‘Why, it is quite late,’ said Annis, getting up. ‘I had not an idea of the time. I am sorry, Auntie, but you shall have your tea at once.’

The kettle had boiled over, and having been removed from the fire in consequence, it boiled no longer. Annis did not notice this. She made tea rapidly, singing softly to herself, and filled the cup without due delay. The contents looked weak, and had a strong flavour of tea-leaves rather than of tea. Miss Randolph drank uncomplainingly, and Annis sat down to a hasty meal, pouring out details of the afternoon’s work. No small item in the pleasure of her daily occupations was

the certainty of Miss Randolph's unfailing sympathy.

'Now I have done, and I must be busy,' she said at length, pushing back her chair.

'You are not going out again, Annis?' Miss Randolph spoke with a touch of wistfulness.

'O no, indeed. Why, I have all these notes to copy. I promised to send them to-morrow, and I must not fail.'

Miss Randolph patiently resigned herself to three hours more of unbroken silence. Annis did not like to be interrupted while copying. She was apt to grow confused, and to make mistakes.

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'I don't know what *you* think, Miss Dermot, but *I'm* not satisfied in my mind about missis,' said Bennet, next morning.

Breakfast was nearly at an end—a solitary breakfast on the part of Annis, for Miss Randolph had not yet come downstairs. This had grown to be no unusual event of late. Bennet was a privileged servant of ten years' standing in the household. She showed herself careful and trustworthy, and Miss Randolph found her a comfort; but she and Annis lived in a state of chronic opposition to each other's

wishes. Annis objected to being disobeyed by Bennet, and Bennet objected to receiving orders from Annis. 'Miss Randolph was her mistress,' she averred, 'and she didn't want no other;' while Annis complained often that 'Bennet took too much upon herself.' Yet, for all this, Annis knew Bennet to be a valuable servant, and Bennet was, in her heart of hearts, proud of the village love and admiration for Annis.

'Not satisfied?' repeated Annis. 'What is the matter?'

Bennet smoothed an upstart plait in her well-starched apron.

'It's not for *me* to say, Miss Dermot. I don't pretend to know more than I do, like some folks. But I'm no way satisfied.'

'Has my Aunt complained this morning?'

'First time in her life she ever did, if she had,' said Bennet. 'I've seen folks that'll cry at a finger-ache. Missis isn't of that sort.'

'If you can't explain what is wrong, I don't see what is to be done.'

'I'm not a doctor,' said Bennet. 'All the same, I can see without doctor's eyes, and there's a look in missis's face as I don't like. I don't, Miss Dermot.'

'We had better send for the doctor. Of course he should come if she feels poorly. He has not been for a month now.'

'And ought to have been every day,' said Bennet.

'That is not for you to decide,' said Annis, with a touch of rebuke, the effect of which upon Bennet's mind was exasperating. 'But we can send for him to-day. Jane can go, I suppose. She must take a message from me, to say that I hope Mr. Franks will call without delay to see Miss Randolph. I have an engagement, and cannot wait to write a note.'

Bennet was swelling inwardly under the set-down she had received.

'You're not going to be out again the whole mortal day, like yesterday, Miss Dermot?'

'Certainly not the whole day—nor was I yesterday,' said Annis gravely. 'You can go now, Bennet.'

'Well, I do think, Miss Annis, if you was to see how your Aunt frets after you, and how she's never happy but when you're in her sight, I do think you'd be loth to leave her all day alone. But it's the fashion nowadays for folks to run after a lot of dirty children, and nobody has got time for

their own flesh and blood. It's a queer sort of goodness.'

'You forget yourself, Bennet.'

Annis spoke with her eyes fixed resolutely on her open book, and with heightened colour. Bennet, having so far relieved her mind, withdrew; whereupon Annis pushed the book away, and sat gazing on the floor.

'Just like Bennet,' she said, half aloud. 'I never saw such an alarmist—always expecting evils, and always trying to manage me, as if I were still a little child under her charge. I don't want to offend her, but really a little checking is necessary sometimes. It is very odd that when everybody out of the house seems to love me so much, Bennet should be so disagreeable.'

But Annis did not pause in her reflections to consider whether this might not be in some measure her own fault.

'As if engagements could be flung aside for no reason. These things are duties—positive duties. If I do not do them, who will? I *must* see after my district. I *must* look up my class-members. I *must* visit those in want. I can't let parish work fall into arrears. Such opposition in one's home is a real trial; but I must expect to have my crosses. The

idea of Auntie minding an hour or two alone is simply absurd. Why, I know how delightful a quiet hour is sometimes. There is nothing I should enjoy more, if only I had leisure to indulge myself in it oftener.'

After which Annis went upstairs, put on her walking things, made some affectionate though rather hurried inquiries after her aunt's health, and a few minutes later left the house.

The morning passed in one rush of successive engagements, so far as Annis was concerned. At dinner-time she reappeared, ten minutes late, as a matter of course.

'I'll just slip off my bonnet, Auntie. Don't wait. I'll be down in a moment.'

A 'moment,' translated, meant another ten minutes. Miss Randolph rang the bell for the hot dishes, which had awaited Annis' return; but she would not have them uncovered till her adopted niece reappeared, looking rather flushed and untidy.

'Oh, have you not begun? I felt sure you would, so I just wrote a little note. Post come in, I see.'

'Yes—a letter for you, my dear.'

'From Ethel. Two months since I have heard from any of them.'

‘So long!’ said Miss Randolph.

‘I am afraid it is twice as long since I wrote. But, dear Auntie, how can I help it. What can I say? I don’t care for their interests, and they don’t care for mine. If I wrote a letter about the things I love most, Ethel would hardly trouble herself to read it through—and as for her letters to me——’

Annis paused to glance down the sheet, the meat meantime growing cold.

‘Don’t you think we had better begin, and then you can read at leisure?’ suggested Miss Randolph.

‘O yes; I beg your pardon, Auntie.’

Annis helped Miss Randolph, and disposed of her own plateful in a hurry. Then she went back to the letter.

‘Nothing very much in it, Auntie; but I will read it aloud:

“MY DEAR ANNIS,

“Mamma seems to think it a good while since any of us wrote to you or heard from you—I do not know how long. We are all well except Mamma and Con. Mamma has had pain in her side lately, and Con is much the same as usual. Nina is just leaving the schoolroom, at which

Mirrie makes believe to be greatly distressed. Nina is full of sage plans for self-improvement, like most girls on leaving off lessons. We wonder how long they will last.

“Percy is working hard, and we quite hope he will gain a scholarship this or next term.

“I am very busy with housekeeping concerns, and letters to write, and calls to pay, so you will not be surprised at a short letter. Nina and I are going to a musical *soirée* next week, and we are making our own dresses, which take up plenty of time. It is rather difficult to get through everything.

“We have just heard from Haye Digby, that he is likely to be ordered home directly on sick-leave ; in fact, we may hear by any mail that he is to be expected in a few days or weeks. It would be very pleasant. We have not seen him now for eight years, and I suppose you and he have not met for nearly double that time.

“I hope you can manage a few lines soon. Mamma rather feels it, I know, when you write so very seldom. I am afraid you will think this interfering. We were wondering the other day when you would come and see us again, for it really seems now as if you were lost to us.



“With love from Mamma and Papa, Con, Nina, Mirrie, Percy, and myself, to you and also to Cousin Selina.

“Believe me, your affectionate sister,

“ETHEL DERMOT.”

‘Haye Digby?’ repeated Miss Randolph.

‘Papa’s orphan ward,’ explained Annis. ‘Don’t you remember, Auntie? He was the son of Papa’s old college friend, and was left entirely in Papa’s charge. I believe he is a steady young man, but quite irreligious. I am sorry he is coming home, or likely to come.’

‘And you have not seen him for—how long does Ethel say?’

‘Sixteen years. But it can’t be more than twelve or thirteen. After that I never happened to go home when he was there; and for eight years, you see, he has been in India.’

‘It is a nicely-expressed sensible letter,’ said Miss Randolph.

‘Yes; it would not give one the impression of a gay flighty girl,’ said Annis.

‘Would it be quite fair to count Ethel that?’

‘Dear Auntie! if you did but know how her whole heart is set upon dress and admiration!’

Miss Randolph gave a pitying sigh. 'Poor girl ! Well, dear Annis, some day *you* may be able to do her good.' Annis was silent. 'Let me see ; she is now—how old ?'

'Nearly twenty-four—just two years between us ; and Constance is twenty, and Nina eighteen, and Mirrie fifteen.'

'And your brother ?'

'Percy is seventeen. It is a thousand pities that he is the only boy. They quite spoil him.'

'It would be a happy thing if you were among them,' murmured Miss Randolph. 'Sometimes I think you ought——'

## CHAPTER III.

### UNSPOKEN WORDS.

IT was not a careless utterance, but seemed to arise from some strong feeling. Annis looked up appalled.

‘Never—never, Aunt Selina! Leave you! Leave my own dear home! Auntie, what can you be thinking of?’ she exclaimed, rising impulsively and hurrying round the table, no servant being present. ‘You don’t want to banish me?’

‘No, indeed, Annis—no, indeed, my dear child,’ said Miss Randolph in some agitation, as Annis excitedly seized her hands. ‘But—but I cannot help—sometimes thinking—thinking of eventualities. You see I am obliged to do so. But we won’t speak about it just now. I feel in such a tremor. I think you had better ring for the pudding, my dear, and another time we will have a little talk. There are one or two things which I should like to say to you. Sometimes I do feel afraid that I have

acted wrongly in keeping you so entirely apart from your own family.'

'Auntie!' cried Annis, in amaze. 'Why, I thought it was the thing you had always most wished—for fear I should learn their worldly ways.'

'Yes; when you were young—I had that reason then—but not now. I am afraid a little selfishness was mixed up with it,' she said sorrowfully. 'I did so wish to make you completely my own.'

'And so I am,' said Annis eagerly—'yours and yours only. Mamma and my sisters are nothing to me compared with you.'

'I know it is so. I don't know whether it is quite right,' said Miss Randolph. 'It has struck me just lately as a hardly reasonable state of things. I should like to arrange for your sisters to come and visit you in turn.'

Annis did not look delighted. 'Ethel came once,' she said, 'and Nina too.'

'Yes; years ago. Would you not like to have them again?'

Annis hesitated, went to ring the bell, and resumed her seat at the table.

'I really don't know how I should amuse them,' she said. 'Ethel would never be able to get along without gay amusements—parties and music, and

concerts and dancing. And Nina will be just falling into her ways, now she is out of the schoolroom. Constantia would be a great care, now she is so delicate—and Mirrie would want amusing all day long as much as any of them, though in a different way. And think how it would interrupt all my work. I could never ask them to go with me to the schools or to the poor. Ethel would scorn such pleasures. Besides, it would be embarrassing for me to have them with me. I am sure I don't see how I could spare the time to make them happy. No other visitors in the world would be such an interruption ; for of course they would expect me to be always at their beck and call.'

The second course being brought in, the conversation was necessarily suspended ; and even when they were again alone together Miss Randolph did not resume it, neither did Annis. Dinner over, she arose.

'Are you going out again ?' asked Miss Randolph.

'Just for a little while. I promised to be at the meeting in the schoolroom this afternoon.'

Annis hesitated, struck by Miss Randolph's mournful look.

'Only if you really want me to stay, I could give it up, of course ; I could send an excuse.'

'No ; it is of no consequence. There are one or

two things which I have sometimes wanted to say to you, but by-and-by will do.'

'Yes, by-and-by, when I come back,' said Annis cheerfully. 'I *could* stay in now, Auntie—but I know Mr. Fenton would be surprised not to see me there, after what I said. Do you mind?'

'No; it is all right. You must not neglect your duties on my account. Only don't be late, Annis.'

'O no, I will be as early as possible.'

Annis hurried away, not heeding a certain suggestion of conscience that duty on this particular afternoon might point rather in the direction of home than of schoolroom meeting. She did not realise how much of self-pleasing or self-denial were involved in the question. The hours fled more quickly than she knew, and 'early' only turned out to be a quarter of an hour instead of half an hour after tea-time. At a short distance from Everest Cottage, on her return, Annis met Miss Randolph's old friend and lawyer, Mr. Rogers—an elderly man, with a good brow and penetrating eyes.

'How d'you do, Miss Dermot? I have just met Miss Randolph. Sorry to find her so poorly.'

'Do you think her looking so?' asked Annis.

He gave her a peculiar glance.

'Yes, I do. Has it not struck you?'

‘She seems tired often, and not very bright. But the hot weather may cause that.’

‘Well, I wouldn’t let her get depressed or be too much alone,’ said Mr. Rogers abruptly. ‘Don’t allow her to neglect herself. She sees the doctor regularly, of course.’

Annis hesitated.

‘Not lately. It has not seemed necessary. We are going to have him in now.’

‘I would not put off. She wants close attention. Good-bye—I am in a hurry like you, but I mean to look in again to-morrow or next day.’

Annis sped quickly over the short remaining space, and entered the drawing-room, full of apologies for not arriving sooner.

‘But I met Mr. Fenton,’ she said, ‘and he wanted to consult me about something which he forgot yesterday. And then it struck me that I had not been near poor old Sally Biggs for a whole fortnight ; so I just went in for a moment, and it seemed impossible to get away again. Her old mother always has so much to say, and I never can bear to cut her short ; otherwise I should have been back before now. Oh, and I met Mr. Rogers too, and we had a few words. I really did mean to be earlier, Auntie.’

Miss Randolph answered rather drowsily; she had fallen asleep in her arm-chair, and seemed as yet only half awake. Annis brought her a duly-prepared cup of tea, but it was merely sipped and put aside. Annis could not induce her to eat anything. Something unwontedly dark and sunken about Miss Randolph's face struck her with a vague sense of uneasiness, not decreased by a recollection of Mr. Rogers' words.

'Auntie, I don't think you are very well this evening,' she said, bending over her. 'Have you been overdoing yourself in any way to-day? Has the doctor been to see you yet?'

'No, my dear,' said Miss Randolph.

Annis went hastily in search of Bennet.

'I find the doctor has not called,' she said. 'Did not Jane take my message properly?'

'Just depends on how you gave it her, Miss,' said Bennet.

'I told you to tell her.'

'I beg your pardon, Miss Dermot, but you didn't. And I'm learning not to interfere except where I'm bidden. Seems to give offence.'

Annis looked back mentally, and was bound to confess to herself that she had not given plain injunctions.



‘You ought to have known what I meant, and have acted upon it,’ she said. ‘Jane must go at once. Tell her to ask Mr. Franks to come directly. I am sure Aunt Selina is not well.’

‘Easy to see that,’ said Bennet. ‘But Jane’s gone to bed with a sick headache.’

‘Then Maria must go.’

‘She’s doing her own work and Jane’s too. There’s nobody but me can be spared,’ said Bennet, with the air of a martyr.

Annis was ashamed to confess that she felt nervous at the thought of Bennet’s absence, though she could not resist an earnest :

‘Don’t be long, Bennet, and please make him understand.’

‘Yes, Miss Annis. I don’t do things by halves when I do ’em at all,’ rejoined Bennet pointedly.

But without doing things by halves, she might do them deliberately, even where speed was advisable. It was plain that she had not yet recovered her temper. Annis dared not say another word, for fear of making things worse, and went back to the drawing-room.

‘Only a quarter of an hour’s walk—if Bennet will be quick. She could be back in half an hour. But I am afraid she will try to pay me out by

making delays. What a miserable thing to have such a temper. Why, she professes to be extremely fond of Auntie, and yet, the moment she is vexed, she thinks nothing of neglecting her comfort for the sake of punishing me. If it were mere forgetfulness I could not blame her in the same way, but really this is quite like malice. Well, I must try to cheer Auntie up a little now. She certainly has been rather too much alone to-day. I must manage differently to-morrow, if she seems poorly still. I am sure I don't know how, though.'

Miss Randolph was still in the same position, drooping rather forward and to one side, as if half asleep. Annis kissed her, and tried to draw her into a chat. Details of work seemed unheeded, so she tried a fresh plan.

'Auntie, you wanted a little talk with me to-day. What were you going to say? I can hear it all now.'

'Yes, my dear,' said Miss Randolph dreamily.

'Was it about home, and Ethel, and Mamma?'

'Yes, my dear,' was the mechanical answer.

'Anything you want me to do, Auntie?'

Miss Randolph nodded sleepily forward instead of responding.

'Wouldn't you like to go to bed?' asked Annis.

Miss Randolph opened her eyes and shut them again.

‘I am tired,’ she said heavily.

‘I’ll put this cushion at your side. There—now lean your head upon it. Isn’t that comfortable?’

The ‘Yes, thank you,’ was very indistinct. Annis made up her mind that nothing more could be done just then, and went to her davenport.

‘No use to waste time,’ she thought. ‘After all, sleep is the best thing for Auntie, and she seems quite done up. I expect she wants strengthening medicine. Bennet can hardly be off yet. Another half-hour or more to wait. I’ll write to Fanny—that will help to pass the time. No use to worry myself. I dare say Mr. Franks will say there is no reason at all for anxiety.’

Fanny Wayatt was Annis’ great friend, living in Collins Mead, but just then absent on a long visit. Annis and Fanny had been for many years on the closest terms of intimacy. Annis professed to keep no secrets from Fanny, and her pen ran rapidly over the paper when writing to her :

EVEREST COTTAGE, *August 15.*

‘MY DEAREST FANNY,

‘I have varieties of things to tell you, and

little time to do it in. This has been such a busy week, that I really *could* not write before, and next week promises to be busier still. How I do pity poor girls who have not a regular work in life ! It must be so dreary—just wasting their hours in little fretting nothings. Fancy if one's chief happiness were centred in dress and admiration ! Why, it is not right to use the word happiness for such poor interests. What a difference now ! Life seems to have in it so much of real hearty joy.'

This was all true, and Annis thoroughly meant it all. But she did not realise that to the heart unattuned to heavenly joys, earthly pleasures have a very strong and real fascination, albeit many a one leaves after its sweetness a bitter taste. Neither did she realise that her own joy in life did not, by any means, consist solely of the spiritual element. She was hardly aware of the many earthly motives working powerfully in her heart, alongside with purer and higher aims : and she did not at all guess how much of spiritual pride was interwoven with the opening sentences of her letter. 'God, I thank Thee that I am not as other girls are,' might not improperly have been interpolated. And yet Annis was no Pharisee. She was only a little vain, a little

self-sufficient, and a little shallow in self-knowledge.

Annis wrote on fluently :

‘I have no end of schemes in my head for next winter, and Mr. Fenton is so kind in taking them up—prospectively. I believe they will all be carried out. I mean to work my utmost. Oh, how much, how very much, there is to be done in this world. When one looks round at the mass of sorrow and suffering, and most of all of spiritual darkness, how one longs to do one’s *very* most, and to leave nothing undone.

‘I suppose people living and working in a great city would think this a strange way of speaking about Collins Mead. Yet we know how much of need and ignorance there is in this parish. Mr. Fenton said to me the other day, “Ah, a parish of eight thousand souls, scattered over a space ten miles by five, is a burden to weigh a man to the dust with the sense of incapacity !” I said, “I almost wonder it can be endured.” He said, “It could not be, but for the word of help—‘Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee.’”

‘I think you and I have something too of this burden—so much as there is to be done, such mere

specks as we are, compared with the need for work and workers. Only God can use us if He will, and I am sure we shall not ask in vain to be used. It is not pride, surely, to know that one's work is not all thrown away. I have had such sweet encouragement lately. My boys' class grows rapidly, and some of them seem so deeply interested—really touched. And about Collins Mead, in one cottage after another I find a welcome where once I was barely admitted.

‘I had a letter from Ethel to-day—nothing particular in it. Aunt Selina, however, seemed suddenly to take up the idea of having her and the others to stay here. I cannot think what suggested it to her, for really the plan seems most undesirable. I should not know what to do with them, or they with me. Nor do I believe they would care to come. However, I hope Auntie will let the notion drop.

‘And now, dearest, I want to tell you——’

A faint moan made Annis lay down her pen. She spoke, but there was no answer. A tremor of undefinable fear ran over Annis. She hurried to Miss Randolph's side, and found her leaning—almost sinking—forward, with half-shut eyes and livid face. Annis thought she would fall, and tried

to hold her up, but found her a dead weight. She dared not move to ring the bell, and her calls for help were vain. The housemaid had gone to bed at the top of the house, and the cook was somewhat deaf.

Moments crept by slowly and yet more slowly. Annis was of a nervous temperament, and the dead silence, the helpless weight resting upon her, the dark uncertainty as to what might be coming or might even have already occurred, were almost more than she could endure. An inclination to scream seized her, which she had great difficulty in controlling.

Tick—tick—tick—never moved a pendulum with such exasperating deliberation. If the seconds were so slow, would a whole minute ever pass? Annis knelt, with her fascinated gaze fixed upon the clock. Three-quarters of an hour and more since she had spoken to Bennet. How much longer to wait?

The creak of the garden-gate was a welcome sound. Annis did scream then, in a voice sharpened by terror, and Bennet's steps came quickly up the gravel-path.

‘Not the doctor?’ said Annis, as she entered.

‘Mr. Franks was out, but I left word,’ said Bennet. ‘He’ll be here soon.’

‘O Bennet, come—make haste—look here——’

‘Why, Miss Annis——’

Annis was free at length to stand up, trembling in every limb.

‘Bennet, she isn’t dead!’ and Annis laughed hysterically. ‘She isn’t dead. Look at her face! O Bennet——’

‘No, no, don’t be frightened,’ said Bennet hastily, though she had grown pale herself. ‘Missis isn’t dead. But it’s some manner of a stroke, Miss Annis, or I’m much mistaken. I wish I’d sent for the doctor this morning—that I do—’stead of giving way to my temper.’

‘What shall we do? Oh, if he would but come!’ said Annis, in distress.

‘He won’t be long. He was expected home every minute. I left word he was to be sure to come as quick as he could. *Poor missis!*’ said Bennet, with real and tearful distress. ‘I’ll have to get somebody in to help us carry her upstairs, Miss Annis.’



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE WILL AND ITS CONTENTS.

THREE short days, and all was over.

Annis rarely left Miss Randolph's bedside. Out-of-door work and parish calls had to take care of themselves. She suffered much from keen self-reproach while watching in the room where the stricken woman lay, even though hardly willing to allow to herself that she had been distinctly in the wrong. It was 'unfortunate,' she said again and again—'very unfortunate and very sad that she had been so much away from her aunt through that last day.' But if anyone had blamed Annis for the said absence, she would at once have risen in self-defence.

She found satisfaction now in doing the utmost that could be done. The unconscious sufferer was tended with unfailing care. Annis hovered about her perpetually, waiting and longing for the moment when she should be able to speak those words which

might have been earlier spoken, had Annis valued them then as she would in these sorrowful days have valued the faintest utterance from Miss Randolph's lips.

The doctor gave little hope from the first, either of recovery or of restored consciousness before death. If Annis kept up hope it was through the buoyancy of her own nature, for she had little to feed it ; but she would not and could not believe that so great a calamity was threatening.

It came ; yet beforehand her expectations were rewarded by a gleam of sense. Bennet and the doctor were both present at the time, and Mr. Rogers, who called daily to make inquiries, was downstairs. This seemed singular in the way of coincidence ; for the first muttered words of Miss Randolph were, ' Mr. Rogers.'

He was summoned immediately, though not before a rapid change was seen to be passing over the face of the sick woman. Annis knelt by the bed holding her hand, with streaming tears. But anything of intercourse was impossible. Miss Randolph struggled again and again to speak—in vain. She seemed to give it up at length, and desisted, with a faint smile of resignation.

' Don't trouble yourself—I know your wishes.

All shall be arranged as you would dictate,' said Mr. Rogers.

She made a sign with her hand from him to Annis.

'Miss Dermot will say the same. Will you not, Miss Dermot? Your dear aunt's lightest wish could not fail to be binding on you?'

'O Auntie, Auntie, how can you doubt it?' sobbed Annis. 'I would do anything, bear anything, go anywhere for your sake. I promise—*promise*—never to disobey one single wish of yours through life—never, if I know it.'

A gleam of satisfaction crept over the sunken face, and then with less of effort Miss Randolph whispered:

'Pray.'

'Mr. Fenton—oh, send for Mr. Fenton!' said Annis hurriedly, and Bennet left the room.

An hour before he had been in the house, but Miss Randolph knew no one then. Now she laid her hand on Annis', and again whispered:

'Pray.'

Annis had prayed by many a cottage bedside, but she shrank from doing so here before Mr. Franks and Mr. Rogers. An imploring look at the latter brought an immediate response. Before the lawyer's

earnest petitions came to a close, and before Mr. Fenton could by any possibility arrive, Miss Randolph had sunk again into deep insensibility, to wake no more on earth. Within twelve hours she had passed quietly away.

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Another day had gone by, and Annis sat once more at her davenport, finishing her letter to her friend. But how changed everything was since last she had sat there! A sombre cloud seemed to have spread itself over her clear sky, and Annis felt herself broken-hearted. She wept incessantly as she wrote, tears blotting the half-dried ink. Annis fully believed that happiness in this life was for her a thing of the past.

‘O Fanny, pity me!’ she said—for to her, as to certain other minds of the same calibre, it was a comfort to expatiate on her own feelings—‘I do feel *so—so* desolate. Nothing is left to me. My own deardear Aunt—more than mother—more than all the whole world to me—oh, how can I ever bear to live without her! I can’t realise that she has gone. It has come with such fearful suddenness. I don’t feel as if I could ever smile again. All zest

will be gone out of my work. No one to love me, no one to welcome me, no one to listen to all my interests. There seems nothing now to live for. I know this is a wrong feeling, but oh, Fanny, the world *does* feel dreary. Others have mothers, brothers, sisters—*many* dear ones. I had only this one—for the rest are merely nominal. O Fanny, pray that I may be comforted—pray that I may be resigned. I am very, very unhappy, though I do strive from my heart to say, “Thy will be done !”

‘The funeral is to take place on Tuesday in next week—the very day on which you hope to return home. But you will find everything here altered indeed.

‘I telegraphed the mournful news to London yesterday. No letter in answer this morning. I think they might have written ; but I cannot expect my griefs to be anything to them. *Your* loving heart, I know, will sympathise indeed with me.

‘With fond love, ever, dearest Fanny, your truly affectionate and now sorrowful friend,

‘ANNIS.’

Annis enclosed, addressed, and despatched her

letter to the post. Ten minutes after taking it from her hands, Jane reappeared.

‘Please, Miss Dermot——’

‘What do you want?’ asked Annis listlessly, having thrown herself on the sofa.

‘Please, Miss, a gentleman has come — Mr Dermot.’

Annis sprang up with haste, but immediately resumed her drooping air. Half unconsciously she was wont to be a good deal guided by the recollection of what would be thought of her. She passed her hand over her ruffled hair, and, with a deep sigh, said :

‘Show Mr. Dermot in.’

Mr. Dermot was already entering—a little man with elastic step, bronzed features, half-grey hair, and bright kind dark eyes, bearing a carpet-bag in his gloved left hand. He came straight to his daughter and kissed her affectionately. His manner, though very frank, had just a touch of shyness about it, as if he did not feel quite sure as to the manner of his reception.

‘My dear girl, this is very sad, very sad for you.’

The sympathy was so genuine and unexpected that it almost overcame Annis, though she had

resolved not to give way before him. Her determination was put to a severe test. She bit her lip, and swallowed threatening tears.

‘I did not know you would come,’ she said, with an effort.

‘What ! did you think we should leave you here alone in your trouble ? Impossible !’

Annis thought she would rather have been alone. She stood with depressed head, squeezing her hands together.

‘Your telegram arrived too late last night for any of us to write to you,’ said Mr. Dermot ; and Annis felt ashamed of the closing paragraph in her letter to Fanny. ‘The post had gone out, and I hoped to arrive before your second post. So we thought talking would be better than letters. They all send their love.’

‘Thank you,’ said Annis dejectedly. ‘Would you like to sit down, Papa ?’

‘I should like to put my carpet-bag somewhere, my dear.’

‘The spare room,’ said Annis ; ‘Jane must make it ready,’ and she rang the bell. ‘Would you like to have a heavy tea, or more of a dinner ?’

‘You dine early, don’t you ? I’ll fall in with your ways.’

Annis went slowly out of the room to give needful orders. Coming back, she found her father gone ; but he speedily re-appeared, and sat down in the easy-chair opposite to her—the chair which Miss Randolph had always occupied. He did not know it, of course. Annis' heart swelled, and her lips quivered. The closed shutters sheltered her from observation.

'And it was very sudden, was it not?' said Mr. Dermot gently. 'You had no idea of any threatening attack.'

'Not—not three days before,' said Annis.

The voice told of tears, though she sat back too much in the shade for him to see them.

'I do not wonder that you feel it. She has been so much of a friend to you—a mother almost.'

'More than mother,' sobbed Annis, rather unnecessarily.

'Well, yes, she has quite taken the first place. We all know that. But you must cheer up, Annis ; you must not let yourself feel as if you were left alone in the world. Remember, you have still a home waiting to welcome you.'

'O no—I can never leave Collins Mead.'

'It is a natural feeling, you have lived here so long ; but you will not feel so soon.'



‘I shall always feel it. Papa, please—I could not leave. All my work and interests are here.’

‘We shall see what is best. You will be forced to do nothing against your will ; but we are longing to have you among us, and you are hardly of an age to set up independently for yourself. Not past girlhood yet,’ and he smiled pleasantly.

‘I could not go. It would be dreadful. It would almost kill me. Papa, Collins Mead is my own true home, and it always will be—it always must be. Please don’t think of such a thing. I will come for a visit every year, if you like, but not to live in London.’

‘We need not decide in a hurry,’ said Mr. Dermot, with, perhaps, a touch of coolness in his voice. ‘It is rather a pity that we have stumbled on the subject so soon, since you feel strongly about it.’

‘I don’t want to seem ungrateful,’ faltered Annis, ‘but indeed I don’t think you know how bound I am to this place. I don’t see how I could be spared ; and I should never be happy anywhere else. I have thought it all over the last few days. Dear Auntie said once that she should leave me enough to live upon comfortably, so I need not be a burden on anybody.’

‘Fathers and mothers do not talk of their children as burdens, Annis.’

Mr. Dermot was evidently hurt.

‘I don’t mean exactly that. What I mean is that I suppose I shall be independent. I thought I might rent two rooms in Collins Mead, and make them my headquarters ; or it might even be possible to board at a friend’s house.’

‘At all events you will come home with me for a long visit,’ said Mr. Dermot. ‘We can afford to wait a little while before settling what your future after that is to be.’

‘Only I could never be happy if the thought of leaving Collins Mead were always hanging over me,’ murmured Annis.

‘Nothing so trying as uncertainty. I quite agree with you there. But one has to endure it sometimes with a good grace,’ said Mr. Dermot.

Annis had again a sense of shame. Where was her Christian resignation ? where her willingness to wait till she knew the will of God ? ‘But I am so shaken, so upset,’ she said in self-excuse to herself. ‘It is so hard to be calm.’

The next few days dragged by somewhat heavily to both father and daughter. Mr. Dermot acted with unfailing kindness, and would fain have com-

forted Annis, but his well-meant efforts met with small success. She shut herself up in her room for hours at a time, and seemed to find her chief consolation in writing sheets full of grief-outpourings to her friend Fanny. The subject of future arrangements was avoided by tacit consent. Annis would not lead to it, and Mr. Dermot had received a hint from Mr. Rogers which showed arguments on his part to be needless. He waited patiently thereafter. Annis asked nothing and heard nothing till after the funeral.

Miss Randolph had had few near relatives. One young nephew, who occupied the happy position of self-constituted heir-expectant, was present at the funeral ; but it was well known that his expectations had received no encouragement at the hands of Miss Randolph. He was already heir to more than sufficient wealth. The general belief was that Miss Randolph would have provided comfortably for Annis, and have left the bulk of her property to works of charity. The general belief probably rested upon shallow foundations.

Whatever were the faults of Annis Dermot, she certainly could not be stigmatised as avaricious. Having a quiet certainty of being provided for, she had not vexed her head with further conjectures ;

and so little was she swayed by curiosity, that during the reading of the will her thoughts wandered completely away from the matter in hand. Mr. Rogers was at the table, spectacled and grave ; and in divers positions sat Mr. Dermot, Mr. Fenton, Mr. Franks, and the young nephew ; while Annis occupied the corner of the sofa, and Bennet stood in the background.

Annis alone of all present failed in due interest. She shaded her face with her hand, and through the legal jargon of 'whereinsoever, whereunto, there-upon, and hereinafters,' sank into a dream of the past, losing consciousness of the present.

A buzz of voices recalled her. She sat upright, and found her father grasping her hand in warm expression of feeling, Mr. Fenton and Mr. Franks smiling broadly, and the nephew looking downcast, while simultaneous congratulations came from all sides.

'I—I don't think I quite heard,' said Annis. 'I was thinking of something else. What is it?'

'My dear, were you not listening?' asked her father.

'I heard part. Something about fifty pounds to Mr. Franks, and twenty to the almshouses.'

'Was that all?' asked Mr. Fenton, evidently

rather amused. 'Then you do not know that you are made full heiress?'

'I!' Annis flushed crimson.

'Everything is left to you, Annis, with the exception of a few legacies.' Mr. Dermot spoke this time.

'Not the house?'

'Yes—and the grounds. Poor Selina has made you her heiress—absolutely.'

'Will you attend now, Miss Dermot, if I read you a portion of the will over again?' asked the lawyer, with a touch of cynicism for his lost labour.

'If you please; but I need not keep you all,' said Annis, glancing round, with a wish to lessen the number of spectators.

The nephew excused himself, and vanished, followed by Mr. Franks. Bennet, who had come in for a small legacy, was also dismissed. Annis sat down again, having started up in her first surprise, and listened to the second reading, patiently gone through by Mr. Rogers.

'Then,' she said hastily, turning to her father, at the conclusion, instead of asking any questions, 'then, Papa, that settles the matter for me. My home will be here still. My duties will all lie in Collins Mead.'

‘I beg your pardon, Miss Dermot,’ interposed Mr. Rogers. ‘I have not yet told you all.’

‘Not all the will?’

‘I have read all the written will. I have not told you all the expressed will. I believe I am right in judging that Miss Randolph’s lightest wish would be binding upon you.’

‘Yes,’ said Annis faintly; but she looked anxious.

‘Even independently of your promise to her at the last,’ concluded Mr. Rogers.

‘Yes, I *did* promise,’ said Annis, pressing her hands together. ‘I did promise, and I do not forget. But surely I should be consulting dear Aunt Selina’s wishes quite as much as my own sense of right, in remaining at Collins Mead. No one knows better than I what she felt about things, and I do assure you, Mr. Rogers, she would not, *could* not, have wished me to forsake Collins Mead and settle in London. I know her feelings too well to believe such a wish even possible on her part. Why, the very fact of this house being left to me, seems to prove that my dear Aunt wished me to live in it, and as far as possible to try to fill her place—as far as possible—for I know how I should fail. Still, surely her wishes are clear.’ Annis spoke rapidly, with some dropping tears.

‘Nevertheless, I must beg you, Miss Dermot, kindly to glance over this little sheet—a mere note of hand, yet I doubt not you will feel it to be of a binding nature,’ said Mr. Rogers quietly.

## CHAPTER V.

### A NEW PROJECT.

THE shutters were once more opened, letting full daylight stream into the long-darkened house. Mr. Dermot had gone out on some little business, and Annis sat on the drawing-room sofa in her new black dress, heavily loaded with crape as for a mother. Beside her sat a plump fair-haired girl, with a sensible and pleasant face, holding her hand. Annis looked mournful, yet excited, and seemed hardly able to sit still. Eyes and fingers were nervously restless.

‘It is so strange,’ she said. ‘Such changes in these few days. And all my plans—all that I had meant to do next autumn and next winter—oh, Fanny, it is hard to be perfectly submissive! I have often felt that though my life was bright, yet I could take trial willingly if God sent it. But, somehow, I never thought of exactly such a trial as this.’



‘I suppose one always does get just the particular trial that one would not choose,’ remarked Fanny soberly.

‘Yes, but still there are degrees of suffering. I don’t think you quite know yet all that I have gone through. Then, on the other hand, having so much left to me—oh, if I were but staying on in Collins Mead, how very many things I could have done!—things bringing happiness and ease to others, I mean. It would have been such a delight. Surely, surely, dear Auntie was mistaken. I know she meant it all for the best, and I know it all came from her love for me; but surely my duty would keep me here, if I were free to decide. Strange that she should not have thought of Collins Mead, of all my poor, and my classes, and the hundred and one things that nobody else has time to take up in my stead. I am not free; for even if I were not bound by my promise, I could not act contrary to her will. But it does seem a sad and needless decision.’

Fanny Wayatt was rather perplexed. From Annis’ long letters, following daily one upon another, she had expected to see Annis overpowered with grief and self-reproach. On coming into Everest Cottage, however, she found her friend eager, excited, flushed, and talkative; ready to descant on

her own distress to any amount, yet perpetually flying off at a tangent to some other subject ; seemingly more occupied with the thought of the loss which the Collins Mead schools and poor would sustain in herself, than with the thought of the loss which she herself had sustained in her aunt. Fanny listened patiently for some time, but at length ventured to say :

‘ I really don’t quite understand, Annis, for I have heard almost nothing yet.’

‘ Not about the will ?’ asked Annis.

‘ Mother knows that you are the heiress, but we do not know particulars. It was only read yesterday, I suppose ?’

‘ Yes. It is a great responsibility,’ said Annis, sighing. ‘ Everything is left to me, with the exception of a few legacies to friends and societies. I am afraid to say how much it is a year. I have no head for figures, you know, and my brain seemed to go round with it all. I don’t feel like myself yet.’

‘ I think rich people must need to pray a great deal for wisdom in spending,’ said Fanny.

‘ It will be riches to me, certainly. But the saddest part of the matter is that I must not live here for five years.’

‘Five years! Must not!’ responded Fanny.

‘It was Auntie’s wish, and her wish of course is binding upon me. Did you not hear of this?’

Miss Wayatt shook her head. ‘I thought you meant that you felt it best to be at home for a time.’

‘For a time; yes, that would be well enough. But five years! How shall I ever live through them?’

Annis took from her pocket-book a sheet of note-paper, and handed it to her.

‘Read that,’ she said, and Fanny pored carefully over the cramped handwriting of Mr. Rogers, closed by a very faltering and uncertain ‘Selina Randolph.’

‘Signed by herself, I see,’ said Fanny gravely, looking up. ‘When was this dictated? In her illness?’

‘No; the very afternoon of the day on which she was taken ill. I cannot help thinking her mind must have been growing a little weak. Mr. Rogers happened to call while I was out, and you know she was always very confidential with him. He says she seemed restless and distressed, spoke of her own health as failing fast, and talked a great deal about me. She said that if she were to die

she would wish me to live at home for a few years. Mr. Rogers tried to cheer her up about herself, but she only burst into tears, and said she could not be happy to think of my living alone here. Then he asked if she could not explain her wishes to me, and she said she did not know—she felt unequal to explanations. A good deal more passed than Mr. Rogers can tell now; but she was so much agitated that he offered to write down her wishes, that there might be no mistake about the matter. She quite seized on the idea, and insisted on signing her name, and I suppose that was in her thoughts when she was dying. Poor dearest Auntie! I cannot but think she would have felt differently in health, though I of course am bound all the same. But—five years! O Fanny!

‘It is a long time,’ said Fanny regretfully.

‘It seems endless. Mr. Rogers asked her what she wished in the event of—well, of such an unlikely thing as my being engaged to be married,’ said Annis hurriedly, with a blush. ‘She said she had no wish to prevent that, if a man of the right kind proposed for me: but she wanted my home to *be* my home for five years, though of course like any other daughter I might be married from my home meantime. That would alter everything, she said;

but she did not want me to live alone here. Poor Auntie! She must have had a kind of presentiment that death was not far off. People do sometimes. I dare say she felt far more ill than any of us knew.'

'I do really think she was right about your leaving Collins Mead for a time to live at your home,' said Fanny, after a pause. 'But it will be hard to lose you.'

'Home! This is my home,' said Annis.

'You called the other so, just now.'

'Did I? It was a slip. I never do in my heart. That will be my place of exile.'

'Still I am sure it is right,' repeated Fanny.

'Ah, you don't know; you, with your happy home, and your sweet mother—you can't even fancy my position. But the worst of the matter is the work I must leave.'

'Don't you think that if you plainly must go, you may be content to leave that alone?'

'I have to leave it.'

'Ah, but I mean to leave it in mind. I don't want to set up my opinion above yours, Annis dear, for you are far more deeply taught than I am. Still I do think'—and Fanny spoke without hesitation, though with diffidence,—'I do think that if God

calls us away from any work which He has given us, He likes us to go cheerfully. It is so easy for Him to put somebody else in our place, or to have the work done in some other way.'

Annis in her inmost heart slightly rebelled against this view of the question, though she answered, 'Ah yes,—Paul nothing and Apollos nothing,—that is what you mean. Still parting is sad work, and one must be missed.'

'One would hardly wish not to be, I suppose,' said Fanny with a smile. 'But you will find no end of work to do in London, not to speak of your own home.'

'Home-work is the most difficult of all,' said Annis.

'And the most important.'

'Do you think so, Fanny? It is a circumscribed sphere,' said Annis. 'One cannot do much there, at the most. And attempts to witness for Christ in words, among worldly relations, so often do harm.'

'Not—surely—if they are wise and loving,' said Fanny. 'Mother always says home-witnessing is the highest witnessing of all. She doesn't think anything at all, she says, of girls being able to talk ever so well about the love of Jesus in classes and

meetings, if they can't show the love of Jesus in their home-lives.'

'That—of course—yes—I quite feel with her. But one cannot *work* for Him in one's home.'

'Isn't witnessing for Him by a holy life working for Him?' asked Fanny quietly.

'Active work, I mean. You don't quite understand me, Fanny dear,' said Annis affectionately, yet with a touch of superiority. 'I must have active work. I must go among the poor, and try to win perishing souls. I could not live without doing so.'

Fanny found herself involuntarily saying: "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."'

'Why, Fanny, what a mis-quotation,—a verse on quite another subject.'

'It came into my head. Don't you think it applies to the right balancing of all duties?' asked Fanny.

'It never struck me in that light. But the balancing of duties is a very important subject,' said Annis, with a flickering smile. 'I have often felt it so, when drawn half-a-dozen ways at once, and wondering whether my day ought to be given to district, or schools, or Sunday-school work.'

Fanny gave up the attempt to make herself understood. Her usual position with Annis was of acknowledged inferiority.

‘How soon do you think of leaving, dear?’ she asked.

‘Ah,—Papa wants it to be quick work. He can’t be absent more than three or four days longer. He says delays will only make partings worse, and wants me to go with him. Oh, how little he can understand!—’ and Annis sobbed hopelessly.

‘What is to be done about the house?’ asked Fanny gently, after doing some comforting.

‘Bennet is to live here in charge, with one servant under her. Mr. Rogers thinks Auntie would have wished me to come from time to time with some of my family—just for a change. She made mention of such a plan. I don’t know, though—I almost think I would rather not come at all than come so.’

‘Oh, you will not feel that by-and-by. It would be so nice to show Collins Mead to your sisters.’

Annis shook her head despondingly, and then, with a nervous start, said, ‘Papa!’

Fanny was surprised, for she had expected Annis’ father to be a rather disagreeable specimen of his sex, and was not at all prepared for the frank and



gentlemanly person now standing by the table. Annis sank into a brown study, and failed to perform her duty. Fanny felt embarrassed, but Mr. Dermot stepped forward, bowed, and half offered his hand, which she at once took.

‘My daughter’s particular friend? I thought so! Annis told me she expected Miss Wayatt. Your name is not unfamiliar.’

‘I ought to have introduced you,’ said Annis, waking up.

‘Too late now,’ said Mr. Dermot, with a smile. ‘Miss Wayatt and I are acquainted. What a lovely day!’

‘Have you been going about Collins Mead?’ asked Fanny.

‘Yes, in the little copse and over the hill. I came by the young Wellingtonia at the back just now. A fine specimen.’

‘I wonder how long it will be before we have one in England to equal the American full-grown trees.’

‘Some few hundred years, perhaps. The Wellingtonia is no mushroom,’ said Mr. Dermot.

‘Worth all the more in the end for its slow growth,’ said Fanny. And though she did not put her idea into words, yet she had a thought that so

it is with the minds and souls of men. For there are mushroom intellects and Wellingtonia intellects; and there are mushroom Christians and Wellingtonia Christians. But the Wellingtonia intellects and the Wellingtonia Christians, slow in growth and mighty in stature, are few and far between.

‘I hope we shall see you in London some day, Miss Wayatt,’ said Mr. Dermot. ‘Come and pay us a visit. Annis will be delighted to see you. My dear, I find I can stay here till this day week. A letter has just come, setting me free from one of my engagements. So now you will have plenty of time for your preparations.’

A little more chatting took place, and Fanny rose to leave. She was accompanied in friendly style by Mr. Dermot to the front-door, and went thoughtfully through the garden.

‘Annis surely is mistaken! If all her family is like Mr. Dermot it must be a happy home. He is a thorough gentleman. He may not agree with her on religious points, but unkind he would not—could not—be. Impossible—with that face. There is the very soul of kindness in his eyes. What can Annis mean by expecting home-troubles? She sometimes almost talks as if she were looking out

for positive persecution. Well—Mr. Dermot will never be the persecutor, I am quite sure. Perhaps she may be a little laughed at, but one can stand that. It is no such terrible hardship. Really I do think it is a good thing Annis is going. It would be very bad for her to live alone. Mother always says Annis needs some of the friction of family life. She hardly knows what it is to have her will crossed. But she ought to be very fond of Mr. Dermot. I wonder if her brother and sisters are at all like him.'

The week passed rapidly. Annis was very busy, and as unhappy as she could well be with every available moment occupied. Packing up what she had to take with her, and putting away what she wished to leave; saying good-bye to friends; receiving and answering notes of condolence; finding substitutes for herself in the various items of her parish work; and finally holding endless conversations with her friend about past, present, and future; all this left little leisure for the indulgence of sorrow. Annis wept abundantly many a time, but she wept while busy, and her tears were a relief to her feelings.

The last evening came, and good-byes were

almost at an end. Some little school-children had run in with bunches of flowers as their parting gifts, and Annis had put them tenderly away in wet moss, deluged with tears. Mr. Dermot was elsewhere, when Mr. Fenton suddenly appeared. He was cheerful as usual, and talked ~~fast~~, but his manner had a subdued touch of regret.

‘This is ~~not~~ good-bye,’ he said at length. ‘I ~~shall see~~ you pass to-morrow. I don’t quite know how Collins Mead will get along without you, Miss Dermot.’

‘Nothing but my Aunt Selina’s wish—her command—could have taken me away,’ half-sobbed Annis. ‘It is a very very bitter trial. O Mr. Fenton ! I did so want to say one thing to you—only if my father comes in I shall not go on. I do not wish to explain it to him at present.’

Mr. Fenton waited—all attention.

‘I have had it in my mind for days. Collins Mead is and always will be my own home. I shall always feel that it has the first claim upon me. And you know I shall be receiving more money than I could spend in London.’

‘Could ! nay !’ said Mr. Fenton, with an odd expression.

‘Ten times as much as I shall want. What do

I care for dress and luxury? Every penny that I can spare must come back here.'

'Well—I shall know where to appeal when I am at my wits' end for money,' said Mr. Fenton. 'I am a practical man, Miss Dermot, and shall certainly make use of the permission.'

'Ask anything—tell me anything that is needed—and if possible I will always do what you think required. I shall not be on the spot, so you must judge for me. But that is not all I wished to say. The new school-house——'

Mr. Fenton moved his eye-brows.

'The *old* school-house,' he said. 'I wish I had any hopes of seeing it renovated.'

'We have often discussed plans,' said Annis dreamily. 'I do not think repairs would be successful. I wish to build a new school-house, Mr. Fenton.'

The clergyman seemed rather astonished.

'Do you know how much it would cost?'

'Not more than I can afford.'

'Possibly—but—have you consulted your father, or Mr. Rogers?'

Annis' lips took their positive set.

'No need,' she said. 'I am of age, and accountable to neither. I have entire control over my money.'

‘Would Miss Randolph have wished this?’

‘Yes, I am sure she would. Why not? I shall be keeping up no establishment. My expenses at my father’s house will be very trifling. I have quite made up my mind, Mr. Fenton. I depend upon you to have the matter set going at once. You will undertake the management of it all, I am sure.’

‘When it is settled. You ought to take time for full consideration.’

‘I have taken time. The schools are a disgrace to Collins Mead. You have often said so.’

‘It would be the greatest benefit you could confer on the place. Still I would rather you should speak to your father first.’

‘You do not make that a condition?’

‘A condition of my moving in the matter certainly.’

Annis was too well used to his bluntness to be disconcerted, though rather vexed at the opposition. She went hastily out of the room, and came back with Mr. Dermot.

‘Papa, please, I have something to say to you,’ she began. ‘Mr. Fenton——’

‘Don’t put it off upon me, I beg of you,’ said Mr. Fenton.

‘No, it is my own idea, and my own doing. I have quite made up my mind, but Mr. Fenton thinks no steps ought to be taken till I have told you what I intend. I am going to build a new school-house for Collins Mead.’

‘Indeed,’ said Mr. Dermot quietly.

‘The old house is wretchedly bad, too small, and badly lighted, and badly ventilated, with a roof almost worn out. A new one is terribly wanted. I have promised to build it, Papa.’

‘I have no doubt Collins Mead will be grateful,’ said Mr. Dermot.

‘Then you will get plans drawn at once?’ said Annis eagerly to Mr. Fenton.

‘If Mr. Dermot is satisfied to have it so.’

‘Annis is an independent lady of property,’ said Mr. Dermot, with a touch of gravity.

‘The old school will have to be pulled down at once,’ said Annis, ‘and I suppose rooms must be rented elsewhere, for the children to have their lessons in, while the building goes on. I will undertake that, too. I want it all set going as quickly as possible. Please consult an architect, and let me have an estimate. I wish it to be a tasteful building, with pointed latticed windows and good-sized porches to shelter the children on

rainy days. Tell them, please, that it is my present to them.'

'I don't seem to have much choice left me in the matter,' said Mr. Fenton, glancing at her father. 'As for thanking you, Miss Dermot——'

'Don't, pray. The pleasure will be greater to me than to anybody. It will be a link between me and this dear place,' said Annis, with full eyes.

'Annis will have to come and see the school opened,' said her father.

The vicar accepted this as full consent, and threw himself into the plan with eagerness. Mr. Dermot grew tired of the subject and went away, but he came back in somewhat less than an hour to find them at it still. The excitement of her project certainly helped to carry Annis through that last night, and through the next day's partings.



## CHAPTER VI.

### THE LONDON HOME.

‘ A LETTER from Papa ! Now we shall hear when they are coming,’ cried Mirrie Dermot, rushing into the drawing-room.

The room was by no means large, albeit furnished prettily and in good taste ; and indeed the house itself was small, rents in the neighbourhood of London being high, and the Dermots possessing no long purse.

Though Mr. Dermot was, as his name implies, of Irish extraction, his family had been for two generations settled in England. The only traces of Hibernian blood were to be found in the dark blue eyes and bright complexions of his children—handsome well-mannered girls, all four like one another and unlike Annis. Constantia, the pallid and sickly member, had the blue eyes and pretty features, though she lacked the roses. Of the other three, Ethel was commonly counted the most good-

looking, while Nina showed a self-contained gravity singular at her age, and gay plump Mirrie seemed overflowing with childish exuberance of spirits.

A slim boy, Percival Dermot, the only son, having much the same cast of feature and colouring, pored over a book, with fingers thrust through his hair. Mrs. Dermot, a particularly ladylike person, plain and gentle-mannered, sat in an easy-chair knitting an antimacassar.

‘My dear Mirrie, what a tornado,’ she said, with placid rebuke.

‘But, Mamma dear, I am so tremendously anxious,’ responded Mirrie. ‘I don’t know how to wait one single instant. Now do please, please, please, look quick, and see if Annis has made up her mind to live at home.’

Mrs. Dermot had rarely done anything quickly in her life, and hurry of mind or of body were conditions almost unknown to her. But though she ran her two needles quietly into her ball of cotton, and placed the half-made antimacassar on a chair, before opening the letter, a slight flush in her cheeks told of something less than her usual composure.

‘Oh, do make haste!’ entreated impetuous Mirrie.

‘I do not believe Annis will come,’ remarked Ethel. ‘She never cares to be at home.’

‘How do you know?’ asked Nina, in a quick brusque style, just opening her pretty lips to speak, and shutting them again resolutely the moment she had said her say.

‘How do I know? Why, judge for yourself, Nina. How long is it since Annis came last? And when she did come, what kind of a visit was it?’

‘Nina was only fourteen then. Girls of fourteen don’t notice anything,’ said Constantia from the sofa. She was seldom off the sofa for many hours together. Never strong in health, she had, during the last three years, been brought low under a combination of ailments—spinal weakness, nervous depression, and hysterical affections, working hand in hand. Where the source of the evil lay, doctors found it difficult to decide. Varieties of plans were tried, but without much avail. She was very tired of it all herself, and made, it must be confessed, no ideal invalid. The family love and patience were, not seldom, a good deal taxed. This happened to be one of her better days.

‘Girls of fifteen do,’ said Mirrie.

‘Not that sort of thing. You would not know in the least, if Annis were here, whether she cared to stay or not.’

It was the household custom to avoid exciting

Constantia's nerves by contradiction, and in consideration of her bodily weakness to let her, as a rule, have her own way. So Mirrie only shook her head, with its loose waves of light air still falling in child-fashion down her back, and responded gaily, 'Well, maybe not, so I'll take your hint and keep a sharp look-out in future. See if I don't. But Mamma, Mamma, haven't you one bit of news to tell us? All this time we are just on the rack with impatience.'

'Yes, I have news,' said Mrs. Dermot, lifting her eyes from the closely-written sheet, and smoothing a corner of it.

'What news? Oh, what news? Is Annis coming to live at home? Will Papa bring her? What day?'

'Don't tease so,' put in Nina.

'It doesn't tease. Mamma is burning to tell us. Look what a colour she has!' cried Mirrie.

Mrs. Dermot laughed quietly. 'You judge of my feelings by your own, Mirrie. I am much more excited at the thought of having Annis, than at the thought of telling you the news.'

'Then you really are excited? I knew you were—I knew it from your face. And Annis is coming? Really coming?'

‘Yes.’

‘To live here?’

‘Yes.’

Mirrie brought her hands together with two resounding claps, which caused a fretful ‘O Mirrie!’ from the sofa.

‘I won’t,’ said Mirrie. ‘But, Mamma, do go on—tell us all, please. What else? Are you delighted?’

‘I am very glad,’ said Mrs. Dermot. ‘Very, Mirrie. The will has been read, girls, and poor Selina is found to have left her whole property to Annis—far more than we expected her to do.’

‘How much altogether?’ asked Ethel.

‘About nine hundred a year, and a nice house and garden rent-free—besides two fields which can be let at any time, if Annis does not require them.’

‘Curious,’ remarked Ethel. ‘And the whole is to belong absolutely to Annis? Are trustees appointed?’

‘No. Your Papa does not think it a very wise arrangement. He is doubtful how far Annis is fit to have the entire control of so much. But that of course is only our private idea. Don’t repeat it, any of you. I would not have Annis’ feelings hurt.’

‘She is six-and-twenty. She ought to be old

enough,' said Ethel. 'Somehow it is difficult to think of Annis as a lady of property. She is so odd and excitable and inconsequent.'

'Four years may have made a difference,' suggested Constantia.

Ethel laughed. 'Oh, Annis will be Annis still. But, Mamma, you say she is coming home. For how long?'

'Five years.'

There was a chorus of exclamations.

'It is by poor Selina's dying wish. She seems to have been troubled with the thought that Annis has seen so little of us.'

'It has not been right,' said Ethel.

'Selina was a good woman, but peculiar, and there was no reasoning her out of a notion if once she took it up. I am sure if we had realised what a complete giving up of Annis it would be, we could never have brought ourselves to the first step. But you must all be very careful how you speak of Selina Randolph to Annis, for your father says she feels the loss extremely.'

'How does she like coming here for five years?' asked Mirrie.

'Not particularly, I am afraid—you see, Collins Mead has been so long her home. It is not sur-

prising that she is sorry to leave. We must try to make her happy among us.' Mrs. Dermot spoke quietly, yet with motherly longing in voice and look. For though the upheaval of anguish which she had gone through eighteen years before at giving up her child was over now, and though people do grow strangely used to sorrow and separation, still the old love for her eldest child burnt in her heart undiminished. Mothers do not change.

'I wonder you don't all feel more delighted,' said Mirrie. 'Here are we wanting lots of things that we can't afford, and here is Annis coming home with more money than she will know what to do with.'

'You don't suppose Annis will spend her nine hundred a year on you!' said Ethel.

'On me, no—but I should think she would spend some in helping Papa. Why, she must—of course she must,' cried Mirrie. 'She couldn't come and live upon him, and make us more pinched than ever now, when she alone has ever so much more than Papa has for all of us together. You needn't laugh, Ethel, for I am sure *I* call it pinching to have to take so much care as we do. And I know we have not anything like so much as nine hundred a year,

and there are lots of expenses, and it is only proper that Annis should take her share if she lives with us. Doesn't Papa mean her to do it ?

'He never will think of proposing such a thing, and he would be very much vexed if any of us did so. If Annis wished to help, I suppose he would not refuse,' said Mrs. Dermot.

'Oh, well, of course Annis will wish to help, so that is all right. I'll tell you what,' cried Mirrie, springing up and sitting down again, 'I'll tell you what I think will happen. When Annis hears all that the doctors say about Con, she will propose to take her away this very autumn to Wildbad, and give her a course of the baths. Why shouldn't she ? The expense would be nothing to Annis. And then Connie will come home perfectly well.'

'I only wish Annis might,' said Ethel, as Constantia's eyes sparkled. 'But I would not advise Con to build upon any such notion.'

'Why not ?' asked Mirrie. 'Annis will have food and lodging, and even if she liked to pay Papa a hundred a year for expenses of that kind, she couldn't possibly spend eight hundred a year on her own dress.'

The girls laughed at Mirrie's simple-heartedness. 'There are the house and garden to be kept up



at Collins Mead, my dear Mirrie,' said Mrs. Dermot.

'Besides, you forget Annis' tastes,' added Ethel. 'She will squander an inconceivable amount on flannel petticoats for dirty old women and tracts for district-visiting. She is sure to set up a district the very week she arrives.'

'But eight hundred a year—or say five hundred, which leaves enough I am sure for Collins Mead expenses—O Ethel!' laughed Mirrie; 'she can't spend five hundred a year on tracts and cheap flannel—not if she filled the house with them.'

'We shall see!' responded Ethel. 'How soon does she come, Mamma?'

'In three or four days. No, I see the postscript speaks of a change. Not for another week!' said Mrs. Dermot.

The week passed to the Dermots in London more slowly than it passed to Annis at Collins Mead. For the girls were curious and interested, and they worked themselves into quite an affectionate eagerness to welcome their long-absent sister; while to Annis every hour that passed was only another regretted stage of the interval still lying between herself and banishment.

Wished or dreaded, the evening came, and at the

hour named beforehand a railway cab stood before the door. Annis entered slowly, with her black crape veil down, and kisses were received in irresponsible fashion. The warm-hearted girls were checked, and a sense of embarrassment fell upon them. They found it a relief to turn to their father, who better appreciated their hearty greetings.

‘Well, Miss Mirrie, you don’t look wasted,’ he said, pinching her rosy cheek. ‘You are almost equal to two of Annis.’

‘O Papa, we are so glad to have you back,’ cried Mirrie. ‘The house hasn’t been like itself the last ten days, only we have been so busy getting our mourning made, that it helped to pass the time.’

A small sob-like sound, half-strangled, came from behind the black veil.

‘Come, come, don’t rattle,’ said Mr. Dermot hastily. ‘The house can never be anything but itself while mischievous Mirrie is within. Where is Mamma, girls? Upstairs?’

Nobody ever expected Mrs. Dermot to be otherwise than five minutes late. It was the habit of her life. She came downstairs now, nicely dressed smiling and placid, and received the somewhat limp

figure of her eldest daughter into a most tender embrace. Annis submitted silently.

‘My dear, will you take off your travelling things at once, or have a cup of tea first?’

‘Anything. I don’t mind.’

‘A cup of tea would be refreshing. Which would you prefer?’

‘She is tired, poor girl. It is a long journey,’ said Mr. Dermot.

‘Oh, let her take off her bonnet first,’ suggested Mirrie. ‘Do, Annis. We can’t see you with that thick veil down.’

Mrs. Dermot composedly lifted the veil and put it back, disclosing a pale passionless face, blistered with tears. Annis stood like a statue, pinching the handle of her little travelling-bag, and looking on the ground. They did not quite know what to do with her.

‘Would you like me to show you your bedroom, Annis?’ asked Ethel.

‘Thank you—I don’t mind.’

‘Give me your cloak,’ said Nina.

‘And me your bonnet and gloves,’ said Mirrie. ‘Annis, I hope you will like the flowers on the tea-table. We thought your country eyes could not do without them the first evening.’

‘Thank you,’ murmured Annis.

The sisters exchanged glances, half-amused, half-vexed.

‘Come, then,’ said Ethel decisively. ‘Tea is ready, and it will grow cold. Nina and Mirrie will take your things upstairs for you. I dare say you will be glad to be spared the trouble. Come!’ and with a touch of good-humoured impatience Ethel threw open the dining-room door.

## CHAPTER VII.

### DIARY OF ANNIS DERMOT.

ANNIS had long been in the habit of keeping a private journal. It was intended to be a regular and daily outpouring of her inmost feelings, and a continuous register of her successive spiritual conditions. Since she was rather given to irregularity in action, the journal was spasmodic in character ; sometimes containing a close and particular record of a week's experiences, sometimes taking a leap over three months barren of entries.

The journal was now to undergo a slight alteration, by being addressed to Fanny Wayatt instead of, as heretofore, to nobody. This was a less momentous change than might at first sight be supposed, since Fanny had been allowed divers peeps into the journal of old, and since Annis frequently declared that she had not a thought concealed from her friend. Some might suppose this assertion to argue a certain amount

of self-ignorance ; but, at all events, Annis believed it.

So after her arrival in London the journal entered upon a fresh stage, being inscribed upon quarto sheets of paper, instead of in a book. It began as follows :

*' Aug. 25th. 3, ST. JOHN'S TERRACE.*

*' MY DEAREST FANNY,*

*' Here I am, and though very tired I cannot let the first night pass without a few words to you.*

*' It all feels very strange and sad and dreary. Looking forward, I wonder how I shall ever get through the next five years. Oh, how could my dear dear Aunt bind me? But I am bound ; I have no choice.*

*' I had a kind welcome, of course. Mamma seems very glad to have me at home. The girls have grown a good deal—the younger ones, I mean. They are cordial and affectionate, and quite receive me as one of themselves. But I feel so separated from them all. It is like trying to mix oil and water. What are their interests to me, or mine to them ?*

*' If I could do them any good, I would not mind*

so much. It seems to me, however, that one has so little influence over one's own sisters. I have to avoid doing or saying anything which might alienate them from the truth—but the usual means of influence in districts and in work among the poor are not available in one's home. One can only passively endeavour, by a spirit of meekness and submission, to avoid giving offence or rousing opposition.

‘ However, I do not mean to be idle during the long five years, stretching out like a great desert vista before me. I mean to get into work among the London poor. That will be an interest, and will help to pass my time until the happy happy day when I can return to my own dear home and belongings. If only it had been three years!—not five. But I must not give way to a murmuring spirit.

‘ I have a room to myself, and that is a comfort. It did belong to Mirrie, and Ethel slept alone in another room; but Ethel says I am the eldest and have a right to the privilege of solitude, so she has Mirrie now with her. This is very good-natured of Ethel. Probably she does not care about the matter so much as I do, but still it is real good-nature. Indeed, I should say that cheerful good-

nature is quite one of Ethel's characteristics. Perhaps she would not be very quick to understand a more sensitive excitable nature than herself, and one would not look for delicate sympathy from her; but in a general and practical way she is ready to do any obliging thing that is wanted.

'At tea-time, when we all sat together for the first time, she said, "I shall have to abdicate my rights in favour of you to-morrow, Annis. I have made tea for the last two years, and now it will be your business." She spoke with a little laugh, and not as if she at all cared about it, but I thought it would have been better taste if she had said nothing. If she did but know how indifferent I am to any rights as eldest here! I feel like a foreigner among them—nothing more than a visitor at all events. Her words brought back the dear happy days, now gone for ever, and I could not help bursting into tears, and saying that I would rather not. And I saw Mirrie and Percy exchange looks, as if they were taking Ethel's part against me. It made me so unhappy. I wish I were not so quick to see what people think. It is a real source of pain, Fanny—I am sure of that.'



' *Aug. 28th.*

' I have got pretty well through the last two or three days. The house is so full and busy and excited, after my sweet peaceful home, that it tries me at times. Always somebody coming or going; callers announced, or notes brought to be answered, or an errand to be run, or a dress-maker to be seen, or a walk to be taken. The day seems made up of little nothings, all looked upon as the serious business of life. Ethel and Nora undertake Mirrie's education, but I don't think she learns much between them. Nora is too near her in age to have any authority, and Ethel is perpetually here, there, and everywhere. She thinks herself extremely busy, but it all comes to very little. . I could not be content with such a life—could you, dear ?

' Nina, too, is busy after her own fashion. She reads and studies in a quiet plodding way, not seeming much interested, but doing it, I suppose, from a certain sense of duty. Mirrie is always trying to shirk *her* duty.

' I have attempted almost nothing as yet, myself. I feel so strange and sad, with all my occupations gone. Mamma advises me to rest and be idle for a little while.'

*'Aug. 30th.*

'I have been thinking very earnestly to-day whether it may not be that God has brought me here for some special work for Him. So much needs to be done in this great city, with its teeming millions. Even in these respectable parts one cannot walk through the principal streets, without getting glimpses of misery and wretchedness, down little lanes and side alleys. If I say so to the girls, they only answer, "Oh, that is nothing! You should see the East End." But when I asked Ethel if she ever went to the East End, she gave a shudder, and said, "No, indeed."

'My thoughts have been on the subject ever since. Why should not *I* work in that terrible East End?

'I foresee difficulties and oppositions. To-day I said something about it to Mamma, and she answered at once, "Impossible, Annis." I said, "Why impossible? Nina tells me that Ethel's friend, Miss Futvoye, goes there." Mamma said, "Isabel Futvoye has her father to please, and if he is willing that she should run risks and do eccentric things, it is not our concern."

'I said, "I do not mind in the least about eccentricity, and I can imagine no risks, Mamma."

““ You do not know London,” Mamma replied. “ For a girl fresh from the country to attempt any such work is quite out of the question—letting alone the fear of your carrying home infection. Isabel Futvoye is an experienced Londoner, and knows what she is about.”

‘ I said, “ I shall soon learn London ways.”

‘ Mamma said, “ My dear, it is of no use for you to think of such a plan at present. Your Papa would object strongly. You must find interests nearer home.”

‘ I let the subject drop there, thinking it best to have no argument so early, though I do not mean to be easily checked. It would not be right. I cannot squander the next five years in fashionable nothings, and I am perfectly indifferent to any charge of singularity.

‘ Of course, I should not think it right to go in the face of a direct prohibition, but I do not expect that. I think there will rather be a series of fretting oppositions, enough to worry but not to deter. I am afraid it all springs from a *spirit* of opposition to what is right.

‘ O happy Everest Cottage, with its dear work, and sweet congenial friends ! How completely one we were—Auntie and I. O Fanny, when I look

back and realise all, I sometimes feel almost as if my heart must break.'

*'September 1.*

'I have hardly yet mentioned Constantia to you. She seems to have fallen into thoroughly poor health of late, and is very depressed and fractious. The first day after I came she was fairly cheerful, but since then nothing has gone right with her. She finds fault with everybody, and says such sharp cynical things that once she quite upset me, and made me cry. Ethel looked annoyed with me, which upset me still more. If only I could feel things less! I do find my own susceptibility a great pain and trouble. Do you think it ever can be cured, Fanny?

'I think they all indulge Constantia far too much. She has her own way in everything, and when she is irritable they all try to coax her back into a good temper. Surely that is not quite wise. How sweet and gentle dear Aunt Selina always was—yet how much she suffered.

'If it were not for this extreme fretfulness and discontent, I could quite think Constantia more serious than the others—I could almost believe her to be one who had really given her heart to God.

I see she reads religious books, and has her Bible often on her bed in the morning. And when a good old man called to-day, a Mr. Robertson, and said some sweet words about the love of God, Constantia listened very earnestly, and her face quite lighted up. Perhaps she has a certain measure of interest in such things. If she were truly one of God's children, it would show in more of patience and gentleness of conduct ; but she may be *inclining* towards greater seriousness than the rest, and even that is something.

'She is very pretty, and so are the others. It is wonderful how much they think of good looks in this house. There is so often mention of people's appearance. I never did much care, for my part, about mere skin-deep beauty.

'I have been thinking still more to-day about the great and terrible needs of the East End. Ethel's great friend, Isabel Futvoye, came to call to-day. She is a ladylike girl, bright and enthusiastic, though gentle. We were alone together in the drawing-room for a few minutes, before anyone came. I found an opportunity to say just a few words about having CHRIST for our Master, and you cannot think how pleased she was. Her face quite flushed and glowed. I felt sure she loved

Him, from that moment. It was a bond between us. Then Ethel came in, so we dropped the subject. I do not feel that I can speak of things which move me deeply before Ethel. There would be an unfitness, an incongruity—you know what I mean.

‘But Miss Futvoye talked about the East End, and gave some most interesting facts as to the work going on there. Ethel heard with a polite show of interest, and at length said, “Annis will care for all that much more than I do, Isabel.” I said, “Indeed I do care,” and Miss Futvoye turned to me: so I asked questions to draw her out. Ethel listened with a curious smile, as if she rather despised it all. She and Miss Futvoye certainly do not seem to be particularly well matched, but they became friends years ago at school. I don’t think they can suit one another so well now as they did then. Ethel said to me, after Miss Futvoye was gone, “Isabel has only become so desperately religious the last year or two.” I said, “I am glad she is.” Ethel said, “I am not,” and she turned off shortly.

‘But I think Isabel Futvoye and I took rather a fancy to one another. She was quite affectionate at parting—held my hand, looked me earnestly in the face, and gave me a sudden kiss. I was sur-

prised, but I returned it warmly. Ethel's lip gave its little curl, which I confess always rather teases me.

'I cannot help hoping that this Isabel Futvoye may before long introduce me to some East End work. If I went with her, Mamma's leading objection would be met. I long to be at work again. I have not, indeed, much money to give, for my promise to Mr. Fenton will swallow up every shilling I can spare, but I have time and interest and sympathy. After all, they are worth the most. Many can give money who cannot give these.

'I have written a line to Mr. Fenton, since coming here, to urge him to immediate action with regard to the new school-house. I do not feel as if I could bear the thought of delay. My heart is at dear Collins Mead all the time. Shall I ever find it possible to be happy anywhere else?

'I am looking out for a letter from you in answer to the first instalment of my journal-letter. Now I will send you the rest that I have written—probably to follow it up with a new supply next week. *You* never grow weary of what interests me, and I find it a comfort to pour out everything to you. But do write, dear, and tell me what you think of my position. I like your matter-of-fact sober views of

life, even though I cannot always entirely agree with them. Write as frankly as you would speak.

‘Ever your truly attached friend,

‘ANNIS.

‘P.S.—When I speak or seem to think of this as a worldly house, you must not suppose that a certain kind and amount of religion is not allowed and recognised. We have family prayers, and there is church-going regularly, and a certain kind of Sunday-keeping. But of the *spiritual life* I see no signs.’

[LETTER FROM FANNY TO ANNIS.]

‘*September 3rd.*

‘MY DEAR ANNIS,

‘Your budgets are always interesting, though I am afraid I shall never succeed in sending you such long letters in return. It is not my way. Perhaps my thoughts are slower than yours, and so my pen will not run so fast.

‘I am very glad you had such a kind and warm welcome. If your sisters are at all like your father, they must be very nice. No one could help liking him.



‘I do not think that it is surprising that you should feel rather lonely and sad at times, dear Annis. Indeed, it is perfectly natural; but of course you will try not to give way to the feeling, so as not to sadden others around—like your own unselfish self.

‘I should think susceptibility is scarcely a characteristic which could ever be cured—but then one would not wish to cure it. I would rather have mine deepened, that I might be better able to feel for others. I fancy one’s aim should be, not to toughen one’s feelings but to restrain them. No need always to *seem* melancholy because one *is* melancholy. I never knew anybody feel things more acutely than my Mother does, and yet how much self-command she shows!

‘You tell me I am to speak out plainly. Do you know, I cannot quite understand what you say about having no influence over one’s sisters. It is quite a new and odd idea to me. I always thought we had the most influence of all over those living in the same house with us: only it is an influence tremendously difficult to use for God, because every careless and hasty word gives it a twist in the wrong direction. I think, too, that it wants an immense amount of courage: because sisters are so

free to criticise what one says, and so sharp to mark an after failure. They have opportunities of seeing our inconsistencies which no outsider can possibly have.

‘That feeling, and also a certain shyness which I think we often have with those whom we know and love best, shuts my mouth, I am afraid, sometimes when I ought to speak. But I cannot see at all why you thought it would be *wrong* to go on talking upon religious subjects before your sister Ethel—for that I gather to be your meaning. You are not shy like me. You are always so brave in speaking out as a Christian should.

‘I read to Mother one or two scraps from your letter; for instance, that part about not caring if you are singular. Mother said, “Quite right, where principle is concerned; but we have no right to gallop rough-shod over other people’s sensitive parts.” I hope you did not mind my telling her just so much. I was a little afraid, when I came to those words, that you might perhaps find yourself giving offence.

‘It does seem to me that you are in a difficult position. So very much prayer and trust would be needed, I know, to keep me straight at all, if I were among worldly people. It is a great deal easier to

serve God faithfully when we live with those who love Him.

‘But I do not feel that I need be afraid for you. Where many would fail, you will not. You have the secret of strength and victory. I do feel thankful that the trial has not been put upon me, because I should be so sure to do harm.

‘Mother wants me to go out with her, so I must stop, but I hope to write again before long. Please do not mind my outspokenness.

‘Your affectionate friend,

‘FANNY WAYATT.’

Annis smiled over the last page of the letter. ‘Fanny is right,’ she thought. ‘Fanny, in a household like this, would be in danger of hiding her candle under a bushel. She is always so timid about speaking out before other people.’

But Annis did not closely consider the former part of the letter. ‘We don’t quite agree,’ was her conclusion, as she folded it up, and put it away. She waited two or three days before continuing her journal letter to Fanny.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A CITY CROSSING.

‘PAPA wants to know, Annis, if you would like to go to Westminster to-day. He thinks it is time you should see something of London.’

Breakfast being over, Annis had taken to gazing listlessly out of the drawing-room window. Constantia had not yet left her room, and Mrs. Dermot was in the dining-room. Annis held herself rather aloof from the household routine. Though a fortnight had elapsed since her arrival, she still passed her days in a very vague fashion, with no particular employment beyond that of letter-writing. She was sinking into a dream of the past, when Ethel's bright decisive tones woke her up. Annis turned slowly: ‘Thank you,’ she said; ‘I really do not care. I would rather stay indoors.’

‘You don't want me to take that as a message to Papa, do you?’

‘Why not?’

Ethel laughed.

‘Really I don’t know. I can do it if you wish, only it sounds rather ungrateful when Papa is so anxious to give you pleasure.’

‘I don’t wish to seem ungrateful, but I hardly know how he can expect me to feel much pleasure in anything yet,’ said Annis mournfully.

‘Really, Annis, you go rather too far,’ said Ethel. ‘One would think you had not a friend left you in the world.’

Annis counted this heartless. ‘If Papa wishes—’ she said, with a half sob.

Ethel went back to the dining-room, slightly flushed. ‘Papa, I do not think Annis appreciates the notion, but I should carry it out if I were you.’

‘Poor girl! I wish we could cheer her up,’ said Mr. Dermot. A thoroughly affectionate father, delighting in the society of his children, more sympathetic than intellectual, more kind than critical, it really troubled him to have this sorrowful daughter, who seemed so separated from them all. He wanted to gain a hold upon her, but did not know how.

‘She looks extremely doleful this morning,’ said Ethel. ‘A little sight-seeing may rout her up, and turn her thoughts to something else.’

‘Will you come, Ethel?’ asked Mr. Dermot, disposed to be nervous at the prospect of Annis in charge.

‘If I can be spared. Perhaps Nina would look after Con to-day.’

‘I thought of taking Nina too. She did not go with us last time, and I don’t think I shall be able to spare another day for some time.’

‘I had forgotten. Yes, it is her turn, and I must undertake Con. She is in bad pain to-day, and wants some one to amuse her. Mirrie can go. She will be charmed to have a holiday.’

‘You must arrange it all, my dear, and please find out what Annis would like to see.’

‘Don’t ask her, Papa. Take her to the Abbey, and you will soon find out in what direction her tastes lie, and whether she cares to go elsewhere afterwards.’

Ethel stood somewhat thoughtfully looking into the grate with its willow shavings.

‘Has Annis said anything yet about sharing expenses?’ she asked.

‘No,’ replied Mr. Dermot, turning his paper. ‘I do not suppose she will.’

‘She ought.’

‘I doubt if she can. All her spare funds must be taken up with this new school-house.’

‘What school-house?’

‘At Collins Mead. Before leaving, she promised the Vicar to build one. He referred the matter to me, but of course I could say nothing. It was a hasty decision, and I wish she had taken more time for thought.’

‘Annis all over!’ pronounced Ethel. ‘Can she afford it? Does Mamma know?’

‘She will not have much left for her own wants during the next three or four years, I imagine. I only hope she will not find herself compelled to use capital.’ Mr. Dermot glanced round, to find his wife’s seat empty. ‘I thought your Mamma was here. Yes, I told her as soon as I came back; but the fact is, the less said by us the better. We might be looked upon as interested parties.’

‘I should say we certainly are,’ remarked Ethel. ‘If Annis knows anything of your circumstances, Papa, I wonder at her.’

But of this conversation Annis remained ignorant. Nina presently marched into the drawing-room, in her own peculiarly staid and business-like fashion, with her large dark blue eyes looking straight before her, her features settled into repose, and her firmly-closed lips just parting to remark,—

‘Papa will start at eleven.’

‘What for? I mean, where is he going?’ asked Annis.

‘Westminster.’

‘Must I go too, do you suppose?’

Whether from habit or wisdom, Nina attempted no convincing argument. She merely said, ‘Yes.’

‘Are you going too?’

‘Yes.’

‘And all the others?’

‘Not Ethel.’

‘Why not Ethel?’

‘It is her turn to look after Con.’

Just then Nina’s antipodes, talkative Mirrie, rushed in.

‘O Annis, delightful! we’re going to Westminster Abbey,’ she cried. ‘Papa wants to show you the Houses of Parliament too, and the Hall, and Westminster Bridge, and anything else that there is time for. We shall get luncheon at a confectioner’s. Nina pretended that she would rather finish some stupid reading, but we all know better, and she *shall* go. You naughty girl, you!’ and Mirrie playfully shook her sister by the shoulders.

Nina submitted with equal serenity to the shake and to the kiss which followed, merely remarking—

‘I would.’



‘No, you wouldn’t. You only think Ethel would like to go, and so you make up an excuse.’

‘I always tell the truth, Mirrie.’

‘Of course you do. It’s the truth that you want to be at home, because you think more of other folks than yourself. As if I didn’t understand. Mind you are ready in time, Annis. We shall start punctually.’

Punctuality was not a leading characteristic of Annis Dermot, but she managed this day to keep nobody waiting. Once thoroughly in for the excursion, she found her interest rising. London sights were to her a novelty, and Mr. Dermot proved himself a particularly pleasant guide, ready to bestow any amount of information.

‘Oh, this is worth seeing, indeed,’ exclaimed Annis, when she found herself within the ancient Abbey, with its time-honoured memorials of the great English dead, its graceful arches and dreamy distances. ‘This is worth seeing. I could spend hours here.’

She enjoyed it greatly in her own way. There are many different modes of enjoyment belonging to different characters. Mr. Dermot’s pleasure was found in the simple fact of giving pleasure to his girls. He cared little about architecture, and liked

a square window quite as well as a pointed one, but he was ready to take any amount of trouble to satisfy the tastes of others. Mirrie roved from one monument to another, reading inscriptions with a girlish interest in finding familiar names. Annis' enjoyment partook of the artistic sense of satisfaction in proportion and grace, together with the vague longings which beauty brings to a nature in any wise sensitive to the power of beauty. Yet her pleasure was never so complete that the consciousness of self was lost in the consciousness of her surroundings.

She noticed Nina suddenly, standing at a little distance, with face uplifted towards a vista of intersecting arches, through which came down a glow of light in richly-coloured rays. Annis' glance went back to her sister's face. Though too habitually self-absorbed to be a keen observer of those around, she could not but be struck with the passion of delight there visible : the shining of the blue eyes, the deepened crimson of the cheeks, and the eager parting of the usually fast-shut lips. Annis involuntarily went nearer, and said :

‘ Isn't it beautiful, Nina ?’

But the enraptured expression vanished immediately, and Nina came back to every-day life with a matter-of-fact,—

‘Very pretty.’

‘You like this sort of thing, don’t you?’

‘Yes,’ said Nina, looking on the floor.

Mr. Dermot was examining a tomb with Mirrie at a little distance. Annis gave him a glance, and then went back to Nina’s calm face.

‘If only Nina cared,’ she thought. ‘If I only had one in my home who felt with me! Yes, and here too—how one thirsts for sympathy even in what is pleasant! Is it possible that she can be in such a place as this, and not think of the great realities of life and death? Yet how contemptuous she would look, if I suggested the subject.’

So thought Annis—but did she know it for a fact?

‘Come, I think we all want some luncheon now,’ Mr. Dermot remarked presently, and they wended their way through the busy streets to a particular refreshment-shop patronised by the family. Annis’ country mind was bewildered by the bustle. She had not been to London for years, and the ceaseless stir gave her a sensation of something like giddiness.

Close to their destination a troublesome crossing had to be accomplished.

‘Keep close to me,’ Mr. Dermot said at starting,

and he piloted his way with a Londoner's dexterity, his three girls pressing beside or after him.

Annis suddenly took a nervous fit, on seeing an overloaded omnibus bearing down straight upon them, quitted her father's arm, and ran back when she ought to have run forward. It was an involuntary movement, arising from her inexperience. She found herself instantly hemmed in on all sides, while Mirrie's scream mingled with the shouts of drivers. She was almost under the feet of a hansom-cab horse, and Mr. Dermot vainly strove to reach her, when a young man swung himself to the ground from the top of an omnibus, dived between wheels and among horses with reckless hardihood, seized Annis and dragged her out of the tangle in the opposite direction. The momentarily checked tide rolled on, and after a few seconds of waiting he brought Annis to her friends, safe, but white as a sheet, and hardly able to stand.

'My dear, how could you?' said Mr. Dermot, making her lean upon his arm. 'You frightened us all terribly. Thank you—thank you for your kind help,' he added, turning to the stranger, who stood looking at them all with a rather singular expression. 'We owe you much. Why, Haye! Haye Digby!'

'The same,' responded the young man, lifting his hat with a half-bow to the party generally, and then shaking hands all round. He was not much over the tall Nina in height, and his figure was thin and 'light;' his carriage military. His hands were small, firm, and embrowned; his manners gentlemanly and cool. He wore a white puggeree, and a light summer suit. 'I recognised you from the top of the omnibus. How is Mrs. Dermot?'

'Fairly well. Ethel and Con are at home.'

Haye Digby looked at Nina.

'I took you for Ethel,' he said. 'Not Nina, surely! But there is no mistaking Mirrie.'

'Have you forgotten your luggage?' asked Nina. 'The omnibus has gone on.'

'Only a bag. I hope I shall recover it. That is all I have with me. The rest follows by luggage-train from Southampton. Rather fortunate that I passed when I did.'

'Very singular,' said Mr. Dermot. 'Annis might have been seriously hurt but for your quickness.'

'What made you run away from us?' asked Mirrie of her sister.

'I—I don't know—I thought——'

Annis was greatly ashamed of herself, and scarcely knew what to say.

'It was rather a near go,' said Captain Digby, looking at her. 'People should always keep together in crossing a London street, Miss Dermot. I believe it *is* Miss Dermot?' he added inquiringly.

'Yes, our eldest. You never knew her well, Haye, but she is living at home with us now. You and she are almost strangers.'

Annis felt inclined to substitute a 'quite' for the 'almost.' She was not exactly attracted by Captain Digby, and yet she had a consciousness of a certain power in him over her. She felt that she would not wish to excite his ridicule.

'Annis, you will never do to go about London alone,' said Mirrie. 'You were as nearly as possible killed.'

Annis did not like to hear the matter discussed. She was sobered, and rather upset by the alarm, besides being discomfited at the manner of her meeting with Captain Digby. Mr. Dermot, noticing her uncomfortable expression, silenced Mirrie with a look, and led them into the refreshment-room. They were soon seated at a small table, awaiting luncheon. Mr. Dermot and Haye had plenty to talk about, the two younger girls joining in occasionally. Annis bestowed her attention on folks at the other tables, and suddenly exclaimed :

‘Miss Futvoye!’

‘Isabel! so it is,’ said Mirrie. ‘I might have guessed we should see her. She was going into the City with her father, and they always come here to luncheon.’

Isabel approached, smiling. She was a ladylike girl, with delicately aquiline features, and a bright expression. Mr. Futvoye, a mild silver-haired old gentleman, being introduced to Annis, and Captain Digby being introduced to both the new-comers, they found seats at the same table. Annis was glad that it fell to her lot to sit beside Isabel. She found opportunity to say, after a while :

‘I have so wished to see more of you.’

‘And I of you, Miss Dermot. I hope we shall often meet.’

‘I should like very much to hear about your East End work among the poor. It must be intensely interesting. I wish I could take a share in it.’

‘Oh, why should you not? I am always beating up for recruits. There is work enough and to spare.’

‘My mother rather objects to my going so far alone.’

‘But we could go together. I always have a friend or a servant, as my father objects to the

same thing. I often wished I had a sister to go with me. We are so near together that it could be easily arranged.'

Just what Annis had wished, and an eager low-toned conversation followed. When the Futvoyes were gone, and the Dermots started again on their sight-seeing, Captain Digby fell behind with Nina and Mirrie, and Annis determined to use the opportunity of a few minutes alone with her father.

'Are we going home now?' she asked, as a beginning.

'Haye will not hear of our excursion being cut short; he says he shall enjoy another hour or two of the City as much as any of us.'

'Papa, I am very anxious to see Miss Futvoye's work in the East End.'

'Isabel is an excellent girl, but she is peculiar,' said Mr. Dermot quietly. 'You must keep your eyes open.'

'I do not mind peculiarity,' said Annis. 'A true Christian must be peculiar.'

Mr. Dermot walked by her side in silence.

'And there is such a fearful amount of misery at the East End,' said Annis. 'It is only right that we who are able should relieve it.'

'Quite true,' Mr. Dermot answered unexpectedly.



‘I would never check a philanthropic spirit in anybody, least of all in my own girls. But you must keep within reasonable bounds. I cannot have any risk of infectious illnesses being brought home ; and I cannot have you go to places which it is not right for any young lady to see. Some do so, I am aware, but I object to the practice extremely—even with the kindest of motives urging them. There are things which you may do with propriety fifteen years hence, which would now be highly unsuitable.’

Annis looked upon all this as ‘worldly opposition,’ and refused in her heart to acknowledge its practical common sense.

‘I cannot be happy to waste five years in idleness,’ she said.

‘My dear, I am the last person to recommend idleness. I quite see that you need occupation ; and, in fact, I think you would have been happier lately with a little more to do.’

‘There has been nothing worth doing. Life is not given us to fritter away on calls and dress and fancy-work.’

Annis felt brave in saying so much, and was a little provoked at the ready assent of his answer :

‘Quite true ; perfectly true. Many girls waste

far too many hours in that way. My dear, you are most welcome to be busy, and you are quite at liberty to follow your own bent—only, as I say, within reasonable limits.’

‘Miss Futvoye wants me to go with her next Friday, and see what she does,’ said Annis. Or rather—I mean—to see what has to be done.’ For there was a somewhat comical movement of her father’s eyebrows.

‘I see no objection to your doing so, if you wish.’

Possibly Annis would have found greater zest in the proposal if helped thereto by a little opposition. But whether Mr. Dermot in reality approved or disapproved, he was anxious to avoid coming into collision with his daughter’s will.

So on the Friday following Annis went with Miss Futvoye. Thenceforward she had work enough cut out for her.

## CHAPTER IX.

### CORRESPONDENCE.

LETTER from Annis Dermot to Fanny Wayatt :

*' Christmas Eve.*

‘MY VERY DEAR FANNY,

‘How ashamed I feel of myself I can scarcely express, for having allowed three whole months to pass away without sending you a single line. What must you have thought of me? But indeed if you knew how *very* VERY busy I have been, you would excuse me. I have scarcely an hour that I can call my own. One engagement follows upon another, till I hardly know where to turn. I used to count myself busy in dear Collins Mead, but now that I am getting into the full rush of London work, I feel how little I knew then about the matter.

‘Twice, if not three times a week, I go to the East End with dear Isabel Futvoye. Some time I

must send you a fuller description of all that we are engaged in there. I have also joined two working-parties, one for India, and one for Greenland ; and there is a weekly Bible-reading to which Isabel and I go together, besides a prayer-meeting. There are also many special meetings, and special addresses given, from none of which we like to be absent. It is so pleasant to be able to go about with her. You cannot think what friends we have become. I never knew anyone more thoroughly congenial. I would not say so much, only I know my Fanny does not know the meaning of the word "jealousy."

'I feel that it is a great blessing to have so much to keep me out of the world. "Unspotted from the world"—that must be my aim. The girls would like me to go to gay evening parties and dances with them, but that is impossible. I told them I could not. It has been easy to refuse hitherto, on account of my dear Aunt's death. But now my own press of engagements would make such a thing out of the question, and I am thankful for this, as it prevents unpleasant discussions.

'What I feel most is the utter lack of home sympathy in my work. I never tell my sisters anything, for it would be vain to look for interest.

When Isabel is here we talk over things together before the others ; and indeed I think it is good for my sisters that we should do so, and Isabel is so enthusiastic about her work that she scarcely cares for any other subject. But we certainly do not receive much encouragement. Ethel is apt to look bored.

‘I do not feel quite sure how far Ethel likes this intimacy between her friend and me. She makes no effort to check it, and rather holds aloof from Isabel, which is not very kind. Poor Isabel feels it, for they are old friends, and, as Isabel says, “Why should a new friendship touch the old one?” You would not think of holding aloof from me, because I have found another friend. And I do not see how I can help dear Isabel loving me. I know I should be sadly lonely but for her. After all, I do not suppose Ethel really cares, though she may have been at first a little piqued. She sometimes laughs, and says, “I always knew you two would suit.”

‘I am so delighted to hear from Mr. Fenton that the schools are really started and making good progress. The two or three days of intense frost last week were a positive torture to me, for I knew they must hinder building. I have a dream of

seeing the finished school-house with my own eyes next summer, but don't mention this.

'You ask in your last if I am growing more intimate with my sisters. I cannot say much as to that. They have their interests and what they consider their duties, and I have my interests and my duties. But I am completely apart from them still.

'Ethel is always cheerful, and in her own way kind, and she gets plenty of admiration, which is what she most cares for. But by mutual consent we keep to the surface of things, and do not say very much to one another. Nina is the most silent of girls. In fact I hardly understand her even yet. Mirrie is simply school-girlish and teasing. Percy is almost as silent as Nina—not in her style, but because he is always buried in books. I cannot say his manner to me is very pleasant.

'I did hope at one time that Con and I might draw nearer together. But we do not. She is so very fretful and complaining. One day I had a good opportunity, and I thought I should be wrong not to use it, to say a word about this. I had undertaken to sit with her for half an hour, as the others were all engaged or out, and she was too poorly to be left—or at all events she thought herself so. She certainly is fanciful, poor girl.

' She was restless and discontented, as she so often is, and I could do nothing right. Instead of thanks I gained only complaints. She burst out crying at length, and said, "You had better go. You know you don't wish to be here."

' "How can you know, if I don't say so, Con?" I asked.

' "I can see it in your face," she said. "You were thinking of it just then."

' "No, I was not," I said. "I was thinking something quite different. I was wondering why you should feel it needful to make yourself so unhappy."

' She opened her eyes wide, and repeated, "Make myself unhappy! Anybody would be unhappy, as ill as I am."

' "It would be trying to anybody," I said. "But some would bear it patiently and make the best of things." And then, as she looked at me, seeming too much astonished to be vexed, for nobody ever finds fault with her, I went on, "You know it is God's will that you should be ill."

' "Of course. All troubles are God's will, but that does not make them easy to bear," she said.

' "I think it does," I answered. "If we love

God, we must love His will, and take cheerfully what He sends us. A murmuring spirit is always wrong."

"Do you love God's will when disagreeable things come?" she asked shortly.

"I hope so," I said. "I am not ill, Con, but I may be some day, and then it will be of my Heavenly Father's sending, and I hope to be able to accept it from His hand with a smile. I know it must be very trying to you to feel so weak, and to have so much pain, and not to know when you will be well again. But if you knew the love of Christ, that would comfort you. And if you would take each day just as it comes, and try not to look forward, you cannot think how much easier you would find it to be cheerful."

"It is very easy to preach," she said. "*You* don't know what an illness like this is. Annis, do you love God's will when unpleasant things come in your life,—not illness, but other things?"

I said, "Yes, Con." For indeed I would not have what is not my Father's will.

"You do—always?" she asked again; and again I said, "Yes."

'She put up her lip, and gave a sarcastic little, "Oh, indeed."



“Remember, Con, you cannot see into my heart,” I said.

“You seem very sure that you can see into mine,” she said coldly.

“No,” I said. “I judge only from your sayings and manner.”

“If I were to judge from yours, I might differ from your opinion about yourself.”

‘I felt that we were verging on a discussion of no desirable kind.

“I do not see any use in going into that,” I said. “We have not to judge one another. Only I have often felt inclined to say to you, how much I wished you would try to be a little more bright and brave.”

“It is easy to talk,” she said again. “You are busy enough and happy enough, and can do what you like, and get what you want. You don’t know what it is to go on like this week after week, feeling that I am just a useless burden on everybody, and a trouble and expense, and knowing all the time that there are things which might make me better, if——”

‘She stopped there. I said, “Why not try them?”

“You don’t understand. You don’t know anything about it,” she said.

“At all events, illness need make no one useless,” I said. “Some of the busiest people have been invalids. And, Con dear, if you would learn to serve the Lord Jesus, you would soon know the real meaning of those beautiful words,—‘They also serve who only stand and wait.’”

“Everybody quotes that line at me,” she said petulantly. “I shall get to hate it in time. I don’t want any more preaching, thank you. I do feel so tired.”

‘And she would not let me say another word, but lay and sobbed. That took place about three weeks ago, and since then she has been quite stiff and chilly to me. I do not fancy she has mentioned our little conversation to the others, but she always declines to have me alone with her. And, indeed, I seldom have time to spare.

‘Fancy my having written so much without one word about this being Christmas Eve. Last Christmas Eve! oh, what a change!

*‘Jan. 2nd.*

‘We hear that Papa’s former ward, Captain Digby, is coming for a long visit. I told you about his return in one of my letters, did I not? He was sent home on sick-leave, and after about a week with us on his first arrival, he went to see

friends in various parts of England. Now I am afraid we shall have him on our hands for a couple of months. He is so cool and superior in his ways, that I dislike very much being with him.

‘I did not mean to send off this letter for a few days, but I find it must go at once, for I have to close with an invitation. Dear Fanny, will you come to us next Tuesday, for a week or ten days? Papa suggested the idea this morning quite suddenly, and Mamma fell in with it at once. You will not, I know, mind sharing my room and my bed. It will be very——

*‘Jan. 3rd.*

‘I was interrupted yesterday, and forgot to finish my letter after all, so it must be posted this morning.

‘I cannot think what is going on in the house; but I have an uneasy sense that something is under discussion, which *I* am allowed to know nothing about. Once or twice conversations have stopped suddenly the moment I appeared, and Mamma certainly looks worried. An hour ago I met Mirrie on the stairs, actually crying. I said,—

‘“Why, Mirrie, what is the matter?” and she said very shortly,—

‘ “Never mind.”

‘ I said, “But could I not help you?”

‘ She said, “If you can, you won’t,” and ran away.

‘ I do think my position is a peculiarly trying one in this house. I seem so separated from those who ought to be very near and dear to me. It makes me feel melancholy and isolated. Your loving heart will feel for me, dear Fanny, for you always have true sympathy to give. Of course, I could say no more to Mirrie, and I am resolved not to ask another question. I will at least avoid intrusiveness. But if it were not for dear Isabel I should be sadly lonely.

‘ Do write and say you will come.

‘ Your ever affectionate friend,

‘ ANNIS.’

[Letter from Fanny Wayatt to Annis Dermot.]

‘ *Jan. 4th.*

‘ MY DEAR ANNIS,

‘ I have very much pleasure in accepting Mrs. Dermot’s kind invitation, and hope to be with you next Tuesday. Please thank her, also Mr. Dermot, most warmly for me. They are very kind to ask such a stranger, and I am almost afraid to

be in the way; but if you think I shall not be, I shall be delighted to see you all. Do not come to the station, for I am quite able to manage. We have looked out the trains, and I expect to reach your house about five o'clock.

‘We shall talk over all sorts of things, shall we not? I wish I could help you in some of your difficulties.

‘I am sure you have trials in your position; indeed, everybody has, more or less. But as you so truly told your poor invalid sister, it is a happy thing to feel that all comes from God’s hand, and we ought to be able to accept cheerfully whatever He sends.

‘I am a little perplexed at her having been annoyed at your words, for you seem to have spoken very gently and kindly to her. But I dare say she was suffering and poorly, and it is hard to be patient at such times. And once in a way, as I know by experience, one does, quite unintentionally, give offence by something in voice or manner.

‘I think your greatest trial of all must be that “feeling of isolation” which you speak of, and seeing your sisters turn from you in trouble. This puzzles me afresh. Even if you had gone to the house as a complete stranger, they might by this

time have learnt to know you. I can only suppose that when sisters have been long parted, they find it harder to draw together than even strangers do.

‘How delightful to see you again! I am almost counting the hours. Mother sends her love, and I remain,

‘Your ever affectionate,

‘FANNY WAYATT.

‘P.S.—I shall so enjoy making the acquaintance of your new friend.’

Annis was not sure how far she altogether liked this letter. Fanny was never quite subservient enough in judgment to suit her taste. Also, she was rather startled to discover in herself a slight—very slight—sense of disappointment at the invitation being accepted. She had not really expected Fanny to come. She said to herself that it would of course be very charming, but still she had a grain of the sensation which in former days had made her dread to see her sisters at Collins Mead—a sensation that Fanny might be a clog upon engagements. Annis had a great dislike to broken plans.

While sitting alone in her room, and thinking

over this letter, Annis heard a tap at the door.  
'Come in,' she said, and Ethel appeared.

'Are you very busy, Annis? I want a few words  
with you.'

## CHAPTER X.

### WHO PLEASED SELF?

‘I AM not going out for a little while,’ said Annis.  
‘I have an engagement at Isabel’s presently.’

Ethel sat down on the foot of the bed, without asking further leave, having shut the door behind her.

‘Always Isabel,’ she said.

‘And why not?’ asked Annis quickly. ‘You do not have much to say to her now. Why should not I?’

‘I have few opportunities of saying much if I wished it. I never forsake a friend till a friend forsakes me. However, Isabel and I certainly are not now peculiarly well matched, so it is just as well that she has taken up with you.’

‘You love Isabel for what she is in herself, but you cannot endure her religion,’ said Annis.

Ethel looked at Annis with unwonted seriousness, and for a moment in silence.



'I love Isabel for what she has been to me,' came at length in answer. 'I don't profess to be very religious myself, Annis—not half so much as you or Isabel, or as Con and even Nina, for the matter of that. I dare say I think and feel more than you know—but at all events——'

'A Christian must live for God,' said Annis.

'Do you, Annis?'

Annis hesitated and said:

'I hope so.'

'Well, I only know Isabel used to be her father's comfort, and now he sees almost nothing of her,' said Ethel, flushing. 'I should not like my father to miss me as he misses her, and she must know it, though he is too good and kind to complain. He is a dear old man. I would like to be such a Christian as he is. But it seems to me that a great deal of what girls call "living for God," is really just pleasing themselves. That is what drives me away from the sort of thing. If they would say plainly that they are following their own fancies, I should not mind; but I get sick of the talk and show of self-denial.'

'You are very hard in judging,' said Annis. 'How can you possibly tell what one would like best, and which seems to one the real duty?'

Ethel pressed her lips together, and looked out of the window.

‘I did not come to talk to you about the Futvoyes,’ she said suddenly, in a different tone.

‘Annis, I am going abroad.’

‘*You* are!’ said Annis, amazed.

‘In about three weeks.’

‘But why?—what for?—how long shall you stay?’

‘Years perhaps.’ Ethel tried to smile, though her eyes were full. ‘And Nina is going too, for six months, and you will have to be house-keeper.’

Annis looked dumbfounded.

‘But what do you mean? What can you mean? I don’t understand. It seems such an extraordinary idea.’

‘It is an old idea that fell into the background for awhile. Aunt Marson—you know her by name——’

‘Papa’s sister in France—yes, I know. What about her?’

‘She has some friends living near her, the Comte de Boireau and his family. I was writing to her not long ago, and I said I thought sometimes that I should like to go abroad into a family and

study French more thoroughly. So she writes back to say that she has mentioned me to the Comte, and he said they were just inquiring after an English governess for their girls. He and the Countess would like me very much to go to the château for two or three years. I should read and talk English with their daughters, and be their companion, and be able to perfect myself in French. They offer a good salary, but still I am to be treated quite as one of the family. So it seems altogether just the right plan.'

Ethel spoke quickly, and in a matter-of-fact tone.

'I never had the least idea of such a thing,' said Annis, utterly amazed still.

'It is not quite a new notion to us. There are reasons why I should be wrong to refuse. Aunt Marson wrote by the same post, and said she hoped I should go, as I could hardly find anything better. She said, too, that she has often wished to have one of us to stay with her for a long visit, and she hopes Papa and Mamma will spare Nina. You know she is Nina's godmother. She would like Nina to travel to the South of France with me, which would be pleasant for both of us, and she knows a lady likely to come to England early

next spring, who could bring her back. Six months of French surroundings and French masters would be a good finish to Nina's education. We have only had this in our minds two or three days, but we have decided to write and accept both proposals.'

'I saw you had secrets,' said Annis.

'Mamma thought it better not to trouble you with plans, so long as we were uncertain. But of course I must tell you now, as I shall have to leave so much in your hands.'

'I cannot see why the housekeeping need fall upon me,' said Annis, knitting her brows. 'Surely Mamma herself——'

'She is very far from strong, and any sort of worry brings pain in her side. You must have noticed that. I have quite depended on your taking the housekeeping.'

'Really,' said Annis, in rather a vexed tone; 'I do not see why you and Nina are to think of nothing but your own pleasure, and why I am to be allowed no voice in the matter.'

Ethel repeated the word 'Pleasure!' as if in surprise, but added, 'It is the only right arrangement. Mirrie is a mere child.'

'You forget how many engagements I have. I

could not possibly attend to every little domestic fidget.'

'I thought even the most religious people taught that neglect of home duties is wrong,' said Ethel soberly.

'I must be the judge as to my own duties,' said Annis. 'You are very ready to blame Isabel and me for neglecting ours, as you suppose ; but I think you forget how this running away from *your* duties must look.'

Ethel bit her lip and turned her head aside.

'But of course, if I find it necessary, I shall be willing to do what I can,' said Annis, after a pause ; for it flashed across her that she was not acting a very obliging part.

'I must be content with that, I suppose,' said Ethel, in a constrained voice, and she rose to leave the room, without turning her face again towards her sister. As she moved, Annis saw one bright drop fall, glittering, and her heart smote her. She half wished to call Ethel back, and to explain and apologise, but pride restrained her. Annis was ever slow to acknowledge herself to be in the wrong.

The touch of self-reproach had so far a good effect, that it kept her from making objections

to the plan in the family circle. The subject was by common consent rather shunned before her during the next two or three days. Ethel had mentioned her air of annoyance, and no one felt inclined to encounter it needlessly. Minor details, as to dresses, packing, and travelling, came to the surface continually, but nobody asked Annis' opinion on the matter as a whole, not even Mrs. Dermot. Indeed, father, mother and daughters, were all so much upset by the prospect of the parting, that they rather dreaded any manner of conversation which might induce tears.

Two days later, Annis bethought herself of saying to Mrs. Dermot:

'Mamma, I had better not have Fanny Wayatt just now. She will be in the way. I can write and put her off. It is not too late.'

'No, dear; we spoke of that, but Ethel particularly asked that you might not lose the pleasure on her account. We should be very sorry to put off Miss Wayatt. Ethel and Nina will not leave for nearly a week after she has gone.'

'I can't understand its being all arranged so suddenly,' Annis said.

'We have sometimes discussed the idea before for Ethel, but always hoped it would not be neces-

- sary. She will not hear of so good an opportunity being lost, dear child! We shall miss her terribly,' and Mrs. Dermot sighed. 'She is always so bright.'

'But Nina too——'

'Yes. There is no question about that. The visit will be a great pleasure, and as she is not strong just now, it will do her good. Then the opportunity of perfecting herself in French—if she ever has to be a governess——'

'I don't understand my sisters having to be governesses,' said Annis, with one of her dissatisfied frowns.

'No; you hardly realised, perhaps, that Selina Randolph's circumstances were always better than your father's. He has had some losses lately, and Con's ill-health is a heavy expense to us; only never say so to her.'

Mrs. Dermot spoke quietly, but the words set Annis thinking on a somewhat new tack.

Tuesday morning came, and with it Haye Digby, cool and superior. Tuesday afternoon came, and at three o'clock Annis appeared in the drawing-room, wearing the particularly shabby black bonnet which she always wore in her East End excursions.

‘I hope you will be back before five o’clock,’ said Mrs. Dermot.

‘Yes, Mamma. I am only going to the prayer-meeting.’

‘Your Papa intends to meet Miss Wayatt at the station. He thought you would wish to be with him.’

‘I would if it were not for this engagement ; but Isabel and I always go together. Fanny said she could easily manage. There is really no need for Papa to go.’

‘He is returning early from the City on purpose. I hope you will let nothing delay you after the meeting. It would be trying for your friend to arrive among strangers, and find you absent.’

‘The meeting is over at a quarter past four, and ten minutes’ quick walk will bring me home. I could not possibly be late.’

Haye Digby looked over the top of his book. ‘That is a possibility I never heard called in question before, especially by a lady.’

Annis reddened. ‘Something unexpected might happen, of course,’ she said. ‘But in an ordinary way, I am certain to be in good time. I can’t wait to discuss the question now, or I shall be late.’



‘Equal determination in the return move will ensure punctuality,’ observed Captain Digby.

‘I wish he would leave me alone,’ thought Annis. ‘How I do dislike that “set-me-down” manner of his, as if nobody in the world knew anything except himself. What right has he to interfere? He is not my brother, though he does make himself so thoroughly at home in the house; and as for age, I don’t believe there are six months between us.’

Haye Digby seemed to have gone back to his book, and Mrs. Dermot beckoned Annis nearer. ‘My dear, have you no better bonnet than this to go in?’

‘They all wear their oldest bonnets, Mamma.’

‘Who do?’

‘The ladies, when they go to meetings.’

‘But this really is hardly fit to be seen. Your ordinary bonnet is quiet enough, surely.’

‘It looks fashionable,’ said Annis.

‘Not too much so. It is most unobtrusive.’

‘It is in the fashion,’ repeated Annis. ‘No, I never go to extremes,—but still—no one wears a bonnet in the last fashion at a prayer-meeting.’

‘Why not?’ asked Haye.

‘It would seem incongruous. Gentlemen can’t possibly understand.’

‘It seems beyond me, certainly. Would any of these excellent prayer-meeting-going ladies wear a bonnet in the last fashion if paying a morning call?’

‘Not a gay bonnet, I hope, but of course *more* fashionable,’ said Annis.

‘And you don’t count that wrong?’

‘No—so long as it is quiet—not glaring.’

‘So long as it is lady-like, in short,’ quoth Haye. ‘But one of these quiet non-glaring bonnets could not be allowed at a prayer-meeting, unless the shape of the straw is semi-antediluvian.’

Annis flushed and half turned away.

‘I can’t expect you to understand,’ she said. ‘It is a sense one has.’

‘A sense of what is congruous?’

‘Yes—that——’ said Annis.

‘May I ask another question? Do you go to church in that old bonnet?’

‘No, of course. We are talking of prayer-meetings.’

‘I thought people met together to pray in church. Is it the building, or the day, or the pews, or the form of prayer, that makes the difference?’

‘I really must go,’ said Annis. ‘People always dress nicely on Sunday.’

‘Wear their Sunday-go-to-meetin’-best! H’m! Then, after all, it is merely a matter of fashion!’

‘No—feeling, I said.’

‘There seems a delicate distinction drawn, quite beyond my keenness of sense. Do you ever venture to read your Bible, clad in a silk dress the while?’

‘I don’t call this reverent,’ said Annis with spirit, and he looked down, dropping suddenly and for the first time his cool inquisitorial gaze.

‘I assure you, Miss Dermot, I am not lacking in reverence, whatever you may think. Perhaps you are wise to follow these “feelings” of yours. But all people are not so guided. I confess I don’t admire startling singularity in young ladies; still I could better understand the consistency which would wear at all times bonnets that might go anywhere. I don’t know anything about the matter, do I?’

‘No,’ said Annis. ‘I can’t talk it out now. I shall be very late.’

And she hurried away, her face burning with a sense of failure. Had she done harm?

‘Poor Annis!’ Mrs. Dermot said compassionately.

Haye’s moustache curled with quiet amusement.

‘She is inconsequent,’ he said. ‘Ladies don’t view things as a whole.’

‘Do men?’

‘Some—I hope.’

‘I could say as much for my sex.’

‘I am bound to acknowledge that a great many men don’t,’ said Haye.

‘And I acknowledge that a great many ladies don’t either, Annis among them. I suppose you and I count ourselves the happy exceptions.’

Half-past four came, and no Annis. Five o’clock came, and no Annis. A railway cab stopped at the door, and Mr. Dermot’s voice was heard cheerily calling his eldest daughter. Mrs. Dermot went downstairs to welcome her guest.

‘Annis is out still, I am sorry to say,’ she observed. ‘It is thoughtless of her, but she made sure of being back in time. We shall have her here directly, I have no doubt. I am very glad to see you, Miss Wayatt. Have you had a pleasant journey? Are you tired? Will you come and rest in the drawing-room for a few minutes before taking off your bonnet? Annis will be delighted to find you here.’

Annis’ mother and Annis’ friend took a mutual liking each one for the other. Mrs. Dermot’s quiet,

affectionate, motherly ways reminded Fanny of her own mother ; and Fanny's fresh face, with its bright smile and frank eyes, and smooth fair hair, pleasantly impressed Mrs. Dermot. They went upstairs together, talking. Mr. Dermot was annoyed at Annis' absence, and afraid that Fanny would be hurt, but she only said smilingly :

'It is just like Annis. You see I know her so well. She never does exactly what she intends to do.'

Mr. Dermot was mollified at first, but as twenty minutes more went by and Annis did not appear, he became really vexed, and hurried out of the house to find her. He might have spared himself the trouble. Of course Annis returned home by another route, and arrived five minutes after he had started.

'My dear, you are very late,' said Mrs. Dermot.

'I am sorry, Mamma—I was hindered.'

Annis kissed her friend absently, and asked how she was, but plainly did not hear the answer. If Fanny had not felt hurt before, she had good reason to feel so now. She showed no signs, however, of any such sensation.

'Impossibilities do take place occasionally, it

seems,' remarked Captain Digby, as Annis stood leaning against the table, gazing earnestly at a small rosebud in her hand.

'Where did you get that, Annis?' asked her mother.

'It was given me, Mamma.' Annis woke up in some degree to the present.

'Are you tired, Fanny? Would you like to take your bonnet off? Mamma, Isabel will be very happy to come to tea to-morrow, after our return from the East End.'

'You are not going to the East End to-morrow, my dear?'

'Yes, there is no one to take my place. I thought Fanny might like to come with us. But we can settle that by-and-by. I will take Fanny to my room.'

Outside the door Annis slipped her hand through Fanny's arm. 'This way,' she said. 'I could not explain before Mamma; but I have been so worried about arrangements. So much going on the next few days.'

'You must not give anything up for me,' said Fanny. 'I will either go with you, or make myself happy with your sisters.'

Annis' face cleared. 'Are you sure? Would

you like to come with us? The girls said you would not.'

'You ought to know me better, dear,' said Fanny.

'Then it will be all right now. O yes; we will go about together, and you will learn to know dear Isabel. You don't care for mere sight-seeing—picture-galleries and so on.'

'I have come to see my friend, not pictures,' said Fanny, smiling. A delicately-truthful answer, for she could not have answered by a decided negative.

## CHAPTER XI.

### ALLOY IN THE GOLD.

MR. DERMOT always partook of a heavy dinner-tea on his return from the City, between six and seven o'clock. Mrs. Dermot preferred simple tea, or found it to agree best with her health. Intermediate folks, on either side of the table, between the dinner-end and the tea-end, might please themselves as to their manner of meal.

Annis, Isabel, and Fanny arrived from their East End excursion about ten minutes before the bell rang, and were in their seats in good time,—rather an unusual event as concerned Annis.

Fanny looked tired and disposed to say little. Annis, on the contrary, was a good deal excited, and seemed to carry Isabel along with her. In her most eager moods she was apt to engross an over-large share of the conversation.

‘Such a delightful day, was it not, Fanny?’ she said. ‘I don’t know how you got on, dear, with



your class. I meant to ask you. Mine was most interesting. Then in the other room afterwards, where the meeting was held, I had two such remarkable cases brought before me; one, a reclaimed drunkard. You heard him speak, by-the-bye. A *very* interesting case.'

'Reclaimed since when?' asked Mr. Dermot.

'He signed the pledge two months ago, Papa.'

'Wait six months before you venture an opinion on him,' said Mr. Dermot.

'Papa, I assure you he is most earnest. It was quite touching to see him. He stood up before us all so fearlessly, and confessed what he had been, with tears running down his cheeks. There were few dry eyes near me. Was it not impressive, Fanny?'

Fanny hesitated.

'I was sorry to see him put forward so soon,' she said. 'He has not been proved yet; and after all he said and professed to-day, a lapse would do double harm.'

'Ah, you did not talk to him. If you had seen his deep contrition you could not doubt his sincerity.'

'My dear Annis, nobody doubts his sincerity at this moment,' said Mrs. Dermot. 'What we doubt

is the wisdom of putting such characters prominently forward before they have been tested, and the likelihood of his persevering.'

'Mamma—he will.'

'Proof—proof—proof,' came softly from beneath Captain Digby's moustache.

'Surely his fearless confession to-day was proof enough of his sincerity.'

'Two years of soberness and keeping in the background would be a stronger proof,' said Captain Digby. 'Much better chance of his perseverance, if folks did not begin by cockering him up with a sense of his own importance. Philanthropy goes mad nowadays, cossetting reclaimed wickedness. Don't look shocked at me, Miss Dermot. I only mean, after all, the same that your friend means. To set up such a man on a pedestal does harm to himself and others alike, whatever be his good intentions.'

'It is quite a nineteenth-century notion that a man is fit to teach before he has learnt,' remarked Mr. Dermot.

'Papa, he did not profess to teach. He kept closely to his own experiences.'

'The experiences of a drunkard!' muttered Mr. Dermot. 'Really, we might find a more interesting

subject. Are you and Annis disposed to come to the Crystal Palace to-morrow, Miss Wayatt? I have promised to take my girls again before they leave.'

'I should like it extremely,' Fanny began, but Annis interrupted her.

'O no, Fanny dear; you were going to that Orphan Asylum to-morrow with Isabel and me. You know there is a special meeting in connection with it, which we would not on any account miss.'

'The next day then,' said Mr. Dermot.

'Papa, we go to the East End then. I could not give up that. There is to be a special address given, of very great interest, and Fanny will enjoy it as much as I shall. And the next day there is to be a prayer-meeting, and a Bible-reading, too.'

'Any more specialities?' asked Haye Digby, under his breath, while Mr. Dermot's annoyed brow was not lost upon Fanny. He inquired rather abruptly:

'What do you really wish, Miss Wayatt? Annis has her own engagements, you see. If you prefer all these meetings ——'

Fanny had her reasons for saying, 'Indeed I should very much enjoy a day at the Crystal Palace. I have never seen it.'

‘Then you will come with us. We shall be delighted to escort you.’

‘I am *so* glad,’ Mirrie remarked. ‘The more the merrier.’

‘Are you fond of music? The Palace Band will be a treat, if you are,’ said Ethel.

‘It will be a treat altogether,’ said Fanny, smiling.

‘Will you come too, Miss Futvoye?’ asked Mr. Dermot.

‘Thank you, I am very much obliged,’ said Isabel, in her gentle lady-like way. ‘But indeed there are several special meetings and addresses this week which I have quite set my heart on attending. And the Crystal Palace is not new to me.’

‘Which day would you prefer, Miss Wayatt?’ asked Mr. Dermot.

‘Any day,’ Fanny said at once.

‘O Fanny, you would not miss to-morrow’s——’ broke out Annis, who had been looking ill-pleased.

‘I think there will be plenty of other meetings,’ said Fanny. ‘I would rather go whichever day suits Mr. Dermot best.’

‘Miss Wayatt does not find it necessary to breakfast, dine, and sup on prayer-meetings and addresses,’ said Captain Digby.

There was one moment's pause.

'I knew how it would be,' flashed through Annis' mind. 'Fanny always was a coward. She is just taking a worldly stand here from the first, because she knows my family is worldly.'

Fanny's voice broke in upon this judgment. She blushed slightly, but smiled, looking straight back at the Captain with fearless eyes.

'You must not misunderstand me,' she said. 'I really enjoy prayer-meetings and addresses—sometimes. Only I have never been used to go to quite so many of them. I should think it might grow into a kind of dissipation. At least, I don't think it would suit me.'

'I am going to ask a plain question,' said Haye Digby. 'Do you actually enjoy them when you do go, or is it merely a matter of duty?'

'Sometimes really—very much indeed. Sometimes I am afraid I only go because I think I ought, and come away feeling it has been a wasted hour. But that may be partly my own fault.'

'Partly—not more?'

'No—they are differently managed.'

'And your test of the right kind is——'

'Fanny has had very little experience in them,' said Annis.

Haye looked at Fanny.

‘I like the prayers when they are really prayers, and not addresses,’ she said. ‘And I like the addresses when they help me to understand the Bible better.’

Captain Digby’s face had not often been more free from any touch of cynicism.

‘Thank you,’ he said. ‘I certainly have a clearer understanding of the matter now.’ And Annis was amazed.

Tea over, she was restless till she could get Isabel and Fanny upstairs in her own little room, apart from the rest of the family. Annis was of an engrossing nature, and liked her possessions to herself. She could not easily bring about the move, for Fanny would not second it, and the Dermot girls wished for a social evening; but, as usual, she gained her own way.

‘This is pleasant,’ she exclaimed, taking a seat between her two friends. ‘Dear Isabel—dear Fanny—I want you so much to know one another well. What a happy trio we shall be!’

‘I am a very new friend compared with Miss Wayatt,’ said Isabel pensively.

‘Don’t call her Miss Wayatt. Do call one another Fanny and Isabel,’ exclaimed Annis. ‘O

Fanny, how *could* you agree to run away from us for a whole day ?

‘I shall like seeing the Crystal Palace extremely,’ was Fanny’s answer.

‘But to forsake your friend——’

Fanny thought it her wisest plan to laugh.

‘Our friendship is not such a mushroom affair that it cannot stand a few hours’ separation.’

‘Then you would really rather go to the Palace ?’

‘Yes. If not, I could not refuse your father’s kindness. It would not be right.’

‘Oh, if that is your feeling I can easily explain to him——’

‘No,’ said Fanny quickly, fearing mischief. ‘I particularly wish to go to the Palace.’

Annis and Isabel exchanged glances, and the three sank into a brief silence.

‘Well, we will not waste our evening,’ said Annis presently. ‘What shall we do? Talk over to-day’s work, or read together? I had some peculiarly interesting cases. I should like to tell you about them.’

‘Do you think we ought to stay upstairs?’ asked Fanny.

‘Ought!’

'This first evening—I thought it seemed hardly courteous for three of us—at least I mean for myself,' added Fanny hastily. 'I do not know Mr. and Mrs. Dermot or your sisters yet.'

'Oh, we are quite free to do as we feel inclined. I am not expected to act precisely as one of the household,' said Annis.

'I think I would rather be downstairs this evening,' said Fanny sturdily.

'I assure you it is all right. Why, Fanny, I shall almost begin to think you don't care to be with *me* at all.'

'You could not think that,' Fanny answered. She waited awhile, however, listening to the outpourings of Annis' experience that day. Then there was a tap, and Mirrie put her face in.

'Don't you mean to come out of your den, Annis? Papa wants a game of bagatelle.'

'There are plenty of you to play. Don't interrupt us, Mirrie.'

'But I like bagatelle very much,' said Fanny.

'Won't you come and have a game with us, Miss Wayatt?'

'I'll come at once.'

'Isabel and I will follow you presently,' said Annis, rather coldly; and Fanny went off with



Mirrie. Mr. Dermot's pleased look convinced her that she was acting rightly.

'No use to ask you if you are a good player,' he said. 'Ladies always say they are not.'

'But indeed I believe I am, rather,' responded Fanny brightly. 'I have two brothers who make me play every evening when they are at home.'

'Then you are in good practice. Come, that is pleasant. Ethel is our best hand, so you two must be in opposition.'

And the knocking about of balls, with cheery conversation and merry laughter as accompaniments, went on for more than an hour before Annis and Isabel appeared. Neither of the two would join in the game. Annis counted it a waste of time, and Isabel had taken to following in Annis' wake. So the two sat and looked on with sober faces, acting rather as wet blankets.

It was a pity, perhaps, that Annis could not read a certain portion of a letter written home by Fanny Wayatt two days later.

'You always used to say, Mother, that Annis took a one-sided view of Christian duty, and thought more of working for Christ than of shining for Christ; and I am afraid she makes the same mistake here.'

‘I do not want to say anything unkind of Annis. We are such old friends, you know, and I have always been used to look up to her, and to think of her as one who lived very near indeed to God. I would not for a moment say that she does not,—but still——

‘It is this sort of thing—I know I may write to you quite openly, because you never show my letters to anybody—Annis seems to think that as her father and mother and brother and sisters don’t come out as decided followers of Christ, she need have almost nothing to do with them. She holds quite aloof, and makes her own engagements; and if they want her to go anywhere with them, she can’t go; and if they want her to do anything, she can’t do it.

‘I should have thought that their not knowing so much about God as she does would be only a reason for her being all the more careful not to say or do one single thing to make religion look disagreeable—all the more careful to please them in every possible way that isn’t wrong.

‘But Annis does not see it so at all. O Mother! she is making such a gap between them and her, and yet they are so kind. If only she would attend more to their little wishes and fancies,

I am sure she might gain an influence over them.

‘She has spoken several times of Captain Digby as a scornful, self-conceited, worldly young man ; and yet last night he let me speak out quite frankly, and did not look at all displeased. Of course, I only said a few words. It can’t be right to *bother* people with religion when they have not learnt to love it ; and those few words were, oh, so hard to say. But I have prayed that I might not be ashamed of the Name of Christ here. Don’t you think that it may be that I was helped just to say what I did ?

‘There is something else which I wish Annis would avoid. Poor dear Annis ! I wonder what she would think of me for writing all this ? But I always tell you everything, and I want you to know all, so that when she comes to Collins Mead you may, perhaps, be able to influence her.

‘I think you have brought me up with your dislike to religious phraseology—I mean to that sort of religious phraseology which sometimes almost verges on religious slang ; only that is such a hard word to use for what only comes from a mistake. When we three girls are by ourselves I don’t mind, for we understand one another. But it *is* a pity,

when we are at table, that Annis should talk so eagerly as she does about "interesting cases," and "touching testimony," and "dear Mr. So-and-so's wonderful gift," and "special meetings," "special lectures," "special sermons," "special addresses," "special petitions," and "special blessings." That one word "special" is worked threadbare. Mr. Dermot looks quite annoyed, and Captain Digby gives his queer little smirk under his moustache, and mutters, "Specialities of the season," or some such remark.

'Mother, I don't want to be hard-judging; I should grieve to be so. I know dearest Annis and Miss Futvoye mean it all for the best. I really do think they fancy they are bearing their testimony all the while—only one simple straightforward word for Christ would have fifty times as much power; and I am quite sure they haven't the least notion how it sounds to an outsider. I suppose it is just a habit of the good people who work so busily with them.

'But, oh, it is a thousand pities that anything should ever be said or done which can give outsiders the very least reason for smiling at what is good. For all this work among the poor is so good, so beautiful, and there is so much of real love to

God and man, and of real self-denial mixed up with it all. I can't help being sorry for these small blemishes, which make the whole seem odd and uncouth to mere careless lookers-on.

'I am not thinking so much of Annis, when I talk of self-denial, as of some of her friends whom I met the other day. The self-denial in her case would be to give more time to her home, because she does not count it as her home, and doesn't seem to think she owes it any duties.

'You will think your Fan has grown terribly severe and critical in London, so I won't say one word more of blame about anybody.

'Annis asks most affectionately after all the Collins Mead people and all the work. She was much interested to hear how the school buildings are getting on. I do not believe it will be long before we see her there for a visit ; only she says she does not know how she is to be spared from her work. I gave her all your messages.

'I had such a pleasant day at the Crystal Palace yesterday. Annis did not quite like my not going with her, I am afraid ; but Mr. Dermot and the girls seemed to wish it. I fancied the plan had been got up partly for my sake, and I thought it would not be right or courteous to refuse. Besides,

I really did enjoy it *very* much—more than I can tell you. And I quite love Ethel and Niná. They are such nice-looking girls, so lady-like and self-forgetting in their manners. I do wish Annis understood them better.'

Had Annis seen this letter, it might have been a check upon the complacency of her remark, one evening, to Isabel Futvoye :

'Poor dear Fanny! she seems to me to have sadly gone off. I used to think her deepest interests were in spiritual things.'

'She does not give me the impression of being careless,' said Isabel thoughtfully.

'No, not careless—no. Poor Fanny! But she does not take the highest stand. A little of Christ, and a little of the world—that is what she would like.'

Isabel did not give her usual quick assent to her friend's opinion. Something said by Fanny Wayatt that day had left its mark upon her mind.

## CHAPTER XII.

### UNPLEASANT TRUTHS.

‘GOOD-BYE!’ It is a hard word to utter. Even when the parting is not for very long, even when the friends are not united by the nearest and dearest of natural ties, it is a word of sorrowful sound, bringing heart-ache with it. There are times not few in this life of ours, when it means not heart-ache only, but something more like heart-break.

Fanny Wayatt’s visit was over, and Fanny had been at home a full week, leaving pleasant memories behind her. But this morning nobody thought of Fanny, for Ethel and Nina were going away, and the Dermot family as a whole, excepting only Annis from the circle, was closely united and had known little of separation.

So, breakfast being over, they stood about, a busy and sad party, trying hard to be cheerful. Mr. Dermot would accompany the two girls to Folkestone. It was not Mrs. Dermot’s way to show

strong feeling outwardly, but she looked her palest, and spoke few needless words. Con stood leaning against the dining-room door, with eyes that overflowed now and then, despite her best efforts ; and Mirrie darted about recklessly, talking fast in husky tones, with forced laughter. Nina had the best of the matter, for the trip abroad would be a treat, and she expected to be home before many months ; nevertheless her pretty lips became unruly every time she glanced at her mother. Ethel wore her usual cheerful air, only with a touch of abruptness about it, and but for the entire absence of colour in her face she might have been counted indifferent.

‘You’ll write long letters to every one of us. O Ethel ! you’ll be sure to write,’ implored Mirrie, with a hoarse quaver, as she twinkled away two tears.

‘Yes, dear, of course—to all of you.’

‘Mamma first, and then Con, and then me. You’ll give me my turn. Oh, I wish—I wish you weren’t going.’

‘You’ll like to hear about all we see,’ said Nina.

‘No, I shan’t. I shall hate everything. O yes, I shall though. Tell us every word you hear said. Where’s Annis ? Isn’t she coming to say——’



Mirrie choked over the last word, and Annis came forward. She felt herself scarcely one of the circle of grieved ones; sensitive and sympathising as she considered herself, she had not in very truth learnt the deep lesson how to mourn with all that mourn. She had the sense of being an outsider, expected to show a sorrow which was not actually hers.

‘I am here, Mirrie,’ she said.

‘Annis, you will take care of Mamma, and not let her overdo herself with Con, please,’ whispered Ethel earnestly. ‘And don’t let Con be lonely. She wants so much looking after. And you will not forget all I have told you about Papa’s likings?’

‘I’ll try,’ responded Annis, in rather a melancholy tone.

‘Come, girls,’ said Mr. Dermot, ‘we must be off. Time is up.’

‘O Nina—Nina, you darling!—O Ethel!’

Mirrie flung herself into the arms of each in turn, then, with a burst of irrepressible sobbing, rushed away. She had upset them all. Con was in floods of tears; Nina’s face worked painfully; and Ethel and her mother clung together, each fighting to hide emotion from the other.

‘Good-bye, my own dear, brave girl,’ whispered Mrs. Dermot at length.

‘Mamma, take care of yourself——’

‘O yes, and Annis will look after us all.’

‘Good-bye, Mamma.’

Ethel stood upright, resolutely composed ; kissed Annis with a whispered, ‘Please comfort Mirrie ;’ drew Nina along, and was gone. The cab drove away, hands waving to the last.

Con was gone too, then, lying on her face upon the drawing-room sofa. Mrs. Dermot went to her, and Annis, remembering Ethel’s injunction, ran upstairs. She found Mirrie in a front room, half hidden behind a window-curtain, whence she had evidently watched the departure, and sobbing violently still. Annis counted herself an experienced comforter among the poor ; but somehow she felt rather at a loss here.

‘Don’t cry so, Mirrie,’ she said kindly.

‘Annis ! Oh, go away—I don’t want you,’ moaned poor Mirrie ; ‘I only want—*them*. O Ethel—darling—Nina——’

‘Don’t cry. It won’t be so very long. Nina will be back soon, and Ethel perhaps too.’

‘Months aren’t soon, and it will be months before Nina comes, and Ethel may be gone years. Oh, I

don't know how to live without them,' cried Mirrie, with a fresh burst. 'And we've been so happy,—oh, so happy always. Ethel never looked cross, and Nina and I were always friends—ever since we were mites in the nursery. I wish, I wish, I wish they hadn't gone. It is so cruel, so hard——'

'Nothing is hard if it comes from God,' said Annis, after a moment's hesitation. 'If it is His will we ought to be willing too.'

'O yes, it is easy for you to talk so, because you don't care. Ethel and Nina are nothing to you. But I know you don't feel like that when you have *your* troubles, because I have seen you, and you just grumble and look miserable like anybody else.'

'Indeed, Mirrie, I don't think you are quite fair——'.

'Con says the same. She says you preach to her about bearing her illness better, and yet when anything happens that you don't like you are the first to complain.'

'It is not to be expected that we should not feel trouble when it comes,' said Annis, in self-defence. 'Only to be resigned——'

'I'm not resigned. I don't see why it need be, at all. And I don't want preaching. I hate it from

you,' cried Mirrie passionately. 'If you were like some people, Ethel wouldn't have to be a governess—but it's all preach, preach, preach, and never a bit of real doing. I like doing better than talk, and I like Ethel's religion a great deal better than yours—oh, ever so much better. She does think of other people, and you don't.'

'Mirrie, you are talking very strangely and very unkindly,' said Annis, after a perplexed pause. 'I cannot imagine what you mean. How could I possibly prevent Ethel's going?'

'You can't now, but you could have done it,' persisted Mirrie, with heaving sobs, and head against the window. '*I* don't see why you are never to have a word said to you. You ought to know without being told all about it.'

'About what?'

'Papa being poor—and Con needing things she can't have. And you've got lots of money, and you just come and live here, and don't offer one penny to help. You needn't look at me so, for I know it is true. I heard all about it. And if it wasn't for that, I don't believe Ethel would have to go at all. But she has gone, and I know, oh, I know it will be years and years before she comes back again.'

Annis sat down, moving her hands nervously.

‘You are talking in a very strange way, Mirrie,’ she said again. ‘What did you all expect me to do? Did Papa wish me to pay for my board, as if I were in an hotel?’

‘No, he didn’t,’ rejoined Mirrie, drawing herself up, and ceasing to sob. ‘He didn’t, and he would be very angry if he heard what I am saying. But it is true for all that. Papa has less than ever this year, and you have lots, and you know it.’

‘Very little spare money; the schools do not leave me much,’ said Annis coldly.

‘You weren’t obliged to build them. You might have waited. But it doesn’t matter—and you don’t really seem like our sister, or as if you cared for any of us.’

Annis was alike annoyed, and at a loss how to answer.

‘I cannot help that,’ she said at length. ‘I have tried to make you all know me better.’

‘You haven’t tried to know us, though,’ said Mirrie with shrewdness; ‘and you are so cold to Ethel. Your religion is all preaching and looking after the poor and building schools, and Ethel’s is being kind and good in her own home.’

There flashed strangely across Annis’ mind a quotation once made by Fanny, and condemned by

herself as misapplied—‘These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.’ She did not like to look the idea in the face, however.

‘Being kind in our own home is not the only kind of work which God gives us to do for Him,’ she said.

‘I dare say not,’ retorted Mirrie, ‘but I expect it’s the hardest.’

And Mirrie went hastily away. Annis escaped to her own room, and there indulged herself in a good many tears of ‘hurt feeling.’ It was very hard and very unkind, she thought. Somehow it did not strike her that this trial, if indeed undeserved, was one of those which ought not to be called ‘hard,’ as coming from God’s hand.

Mrs. Dermot presently came in, with a little warning tap before entrance.

‘My dear, are you here? I thought so. Mirrie has been talking to you, I am afraid, in a way that she ought not.’

‘It does not signify,’ said Annis, with averted eyes and heaving chest. ‘I cannot expect to be understood. No one understands me here.’

‘Why not?’

Annis made no answer. Mrs. Dermot sat down beside her.

‘My dear, you must not trouble yourself about Mirrie’s words. She was in distress, and she is very impulsive, but it was quite against orders. Knowing that, she came afterwards to confess what she had done.’

‘If only I had never left Collins Mead,’ half-sobbed Annis.

‘You had no choice about that. I do not think you could really wish it.’

‘I am not understood here. I am not——’ she almost said ‘appreciated,’ but stopped in time. ‘Our interests are not one.’

‘Which interests?’

Annis was silent.

‘At all events, you must forget what Mirrie let slip in her excitement. She was quite wrong to speak as she did.’

‘I suppose you all feel so—and it isn’t likely—it isn’t likely you should care—about the dear Collins Mead schools—and I am sure it leaves me little enough in hand,’ murmured Annis brokenly.

‘Of course; and we quite understand. Once bound, you have no choice about going on,’ said Mrs. Dermot.

‘I am sure I don’t know what Mirrie meant, then,’ said Annis.

‘She had not the interest you have in Collins Mead—and girls have their little fancies and expectations.’

‘I don’t see what I am expected to have done.’

‘Nothing,’ said Mrs. Dermot ; but as Annis still looked worried and dissatisfied, she added, ‘Poor Con has been a heavy expense to us, and we have only just managed to pay our way the last two or three years. You must have noticed how careful the girls are. Then the doctors have recommended that we should try a course of German baths for Con—but the expense has been quite beyond our power. That is Ethel’s chief reason for going.’

‘Do they think the baths would cure her?’

‘Not one course ; but if they were found to suit her, several courses might. Ethel hopes now to manage this for Con in the spring or summer. We have not told Con or Mirrie so much, however, for fear it should distress Con to think that Ethel leaves home for her sake.’

‘If I had not promised to build the schools, I might have offered to do something,’ said Annis unwillingly. ‘But still—I did think it right—and they are so needed—and it seems my duty to do all I can for Collins Mead. The place has a claim upon me. I can’t help feeling that it has. I should



not like to leave it neglected, and spend all my money in London.'

Mrs. Dermot did not arrest Annis in her anxious endeavours to prove herself in the right. She said, after some thought :

'Ethel hoped you would fit in better with all of us when she was away.'

'It is not my fault——' began Annis.

'We will not blame anybody,' said Mrs. Dermot, with a gentle smile on her pale lips. 'Things have not been quite as they should be, Annis—don't you think so? And I shall feel sadly lost now, without Ethel. She has always been my right hand. I shall need some comfort from my eldest daughter.'

'I will do all I can,' faltered Annis.

'What do you wish about the housekeeping?'

'I thought I was to take it. Ethel said so.'

'I don't want to victimise you, my dear.'

Annis felt ashamed, not for the first time that day. 'I ought, of course,' she said ; 'you are not strong enough.'

'I don't think I am, and I shall have much more to do in looking after Con. Still, if you dislike undertaking it, I will make the attempt.'

'O no, I must manage all that, of course,' sighed Annis.

‘What about the days you are at the East End?’

‘I must start by rather a later train. I shall settle everything with cook before I leave.’

Mrs. Dermot said no more, and Annis resolved that, at least in the housekeeping department, there should be no just cause for complaint. She would do her duties thoroughly. Nobody should venture to hint again that her work among the poor interfered with her home usefulness.

So she made a good start—looking well into matters great and little; examining bills with a view to economy; taking notes of everything that had to be remembered; trying hard to suit the needs and tastes of everybody. The first week went smoothly.

Afterwards there came a falling off. Annis was determined to keep on all her out-of-door work in addition to indoor work, and she soon discovered that one or the other must in some measure go to the wall; since more than a certain amount of work cannot by any possibility be crowded into a certain space of time. When the preparation for a Bible-class and the ordering of a dinner came into competition, dinner was apt to obtain a small share of attention. All very well, if Annis herself had

alone been concerned, but by no means well when others were concerned.

Haye Digby had, with considerable delicacy, arranged to pay a visit to a friend during the last three days of the girls' stay in England. Soon after they were gone, however, he re-appeared, and seemed inclined to abide for the present in the quarters he had before occupied. As his presence was allowed to be no additional expense, there could be no objection made ; but undoubtedly it involved some additional trouble in the housekeeping. He was a rather particular gentleman.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### BUTTER AND EGGS *versus* SOMETHING ELSE.

‘MOTHER says always, that there are duties *and* duties, Miss Futvoye, and it is just as bad to leave the one set undone, as it would be to leave the other set undone. She says people so often forget to keep the balance. And she says “duty” means simply that we are bound to do what God gives us to do ; and she can’t see that it is any better for a person to run when God wills her to stand still, than for a person to stand still when God wills her to run. She says the first thing is to know what God wishes, and the second thing is to do it.’

These were the words, uttered in Fanny Wayatt’s straightforward manner, which had made a marked impression on the mind of Isabel Futvoye. They did not immediately influence her actions, but they haunted her memory, and induced some self-searching.

‘Going off to the East End again, Issy?’ asked Mr. Futvoye pleasantly, one day.

He was a handsome kind old man, with his silver hair and high-bred manners.

‘If you don’t want me, father.’

This was a regular formula.

‘And if I do, Issy?’

He did not often say that. More commonly his reply was,

‘No, no : go and be busy in the good cause, my child.’

‘I would try to arrange to stay at home.’

‘And pine away the hours with her old father? Better this than the old love of gaiety, Issy.’

She came close to his side, and knelt down, laying her head on his shoulder. A sudden feeling of fear, of compunction, was creeping into her heart. Had she acted rightly of late in leaving him so much alone? Was it indeed her duty?

‘Father, are you ever lonely?’

‘Sometimes, my dear.’

‘Then it isn’t right—it can’t be right of me——’

He passed his hand lovingly over her hair : ‘What if God had called you to missionary work abroad? That might have been. I could not have held you back.’ Isabel looked wistfully at him,

and he smiled. 'But I do not fear. I don't think it will be. Jesus gave back the only son to his mother, and the only brother to his sisters, and the only child to her parents. I don't think He will call my only one to leave me for foreign work, while I am in this world.'

'Father, do you think—am I making a mistake? Does He call me to leave you so much as I am doing now?'

'I cannot tell, Issy. That is for thee to answer. I would not lift a finger to hinder the Lord's work.'

'Is it His work? But what if He really means me to be more of a comfort to you?'

Mr. Futvoye put his arm round Isabel and held her to him. Had he often thirsted to have her there?

'I love that my child should help those who are in need, and teach those who are ignorant,' he said at length.

'But if I am doing too much—if you are lonely without me—oh, I would rather give it all up than make such a mistake,' said Isabel. 'Father, Ethel told me something the other day about Annis that I did not know before, and I can't forget it. Annis was very busy at her last home, so busy that her aunt was left a great deal alone, and her last illness

came on, I believe, while Annis was out—or at least she had needed more looking after. Annis missed hearing some last words that her aunt wished to say. It must have been a great trial to Annis, and I said so to Ethel ; but she said she believed Annis always thought she had been about her duty, and was not to blame. I could not feel so in her place. I should be so sure that my duty really was with *you*.'

'You will miss your train, Issy, and keep your friend waiting.'

'There are trains every ten minutes. It doesn't matter. Tell me what to do, please. Shall I give it all up? Shall I spend all my time with you?'

'No,' he said at once and emphatically. 'I would not hinder what I believe to be work for my God.'

'Then what shall I do? I must not go on like this. It isn't as if I were not your only one. I can't bear you to be lonely.'

'Well,' he said, after a pause, 'let me have you in the evenings, Issy, and on *some* afternoons when you do not go to the East End. That will make your old father happy.'

'O father,' and she burst into tears, 'I will never spend the evenings away from you again.'

Annis waited impatiently at the underground station from which they habitually started. Two trains came and left after the usual time, before Isabel made her appearance. The next was not quite due. Traces of tears made Annis ask affectionately, 'Anything gone wrong, dear? I was quite afraid you were poorly, only I felt sure you would send word.'

'I have only had a little talk with my father. Annis dear, I must come back by an earlier train. I have promised him to be in time always for dinner.'

'We shall have to leave work undone,' said Annis, far from satisfied.

'Others must take it up. I am sure I have been wrong. He has felt so lonely without me. You see I am an only child—and my mother too having been taken——'

'Certainly that does make a difference,' said Annis, catching at the argument. 'Now I am one of a large party. But it is very inconvenient. I do not know how we are to manage.'

The train approaching they had to spring in, and that question was left undecided—only Isabel held to her point. She was glad she had bound herself by a promise.



The fact that Annis was one of a large party did not, now that she had stepped into the office of housekeeper, lessen the demands made upon her time. Those whose comfort was in a considerable measure dependent upon her management, began to find the house not what it had been in Ethel's days. One morning Annis forgot to order any vegetables for dinner. Another morning she forgot to order any meat before starting to her work, and at dinner-time all that appeared was a bone of cold mutton. Having given offence to the cook by once or twice 'setting her down,' the said dignitary revenged herself by refusing to make good her young mistress's blunders. This day butter ran suddenly short ; that day darkness came on, and no candles were available ; a third day tea-caddy and tea-box were alike empty. For a while people could smile ; but Annis did not like to be laughed at, and gradually the household spirit became somewhat chafed.

'Breakfast not ready ! I gave particular orders last night that it was to be half-an-hour earlier,' said Mr. Dermot one morning, entering the dining-room, to find a half-laid table, upon which Mrs. Dermot, Mirrie, Captain Digby, and Percy were gazing.

'You ought to have been in time,' he added to the damsel in waiting.

'Please, sir, Miss Dermot said nothing about it at all to cook nor me,' was the answer.

'No, she quite forgot,' added Mirrie; 'for I went to her just now, and she is only half dressed. She said it was very tiresome. Mamma told all of us last night.'

'Tiresome! Well, I must be off to the City without any breakfast. I can't break my engagement.'

'O Papa, we'll get tea made directly!' exclaimed Mirrie. 'You mustn't go without food. *Do* make haste, Jane.'

Mirrie flew about, helping to get things into readiness. Mr. Dermot stood looking on, with a touch of moodiness. 'It is very strange,' he said. 'One may as well speak to a post as give orders to Annis. Ethel never forgot.'

'Ethel was a born housekeeper,' said Mrs. Dermot. 'Order two fresh eggs to be boiled at once for your Papa, Mirrie.'

Mirrie vanished and reappeared. 'Mamma, cook says there are no fresh eggs in the house—no eggs at all.'

'Annis is really very careless. Tell her to grill some bacon.'

'I don't care for bacon, thank you, and there is no time. Stop, Mirrie.' Mr. Dermot was rather 'put out,' as the best-tempered men will sometimes be under like circumstances. He cut a slice of bread, buttered it, and ate it standing, while Mrs. Dermot made tea with water that did not boil. Annis came in, buttoning her cuffs, and looking rather untidy.

'Papa, I am very sorry,' she said; 'I quite forgot about breakfast being early. I had so much to think about yesterday.'

'Of course, of course,' said Mr. Dermot, swallowing some tea hastily, and setting down the cup with a wry face. 'We must not expect too much attention to these little details.'

Haye Digby was looking through a newspaper, in the window, with a somewhat bored expression. 'Prayer-meetings to wit, no doubt,' he said.

Annis did not know what to answer. It was a pity she did not at once and frankly acknowledge herself in the wrong; but she only stood beside the table, looking down, and fidgeting with a spoon.

'There are no eggs in the house, Annis,' said Mrs. Dermot.

'Oh, are there not? Cook should have ordered more in. It really is impossible that I should

remember every single thing,' said Annis, with a touch of peevishness, feeling herself condemned by common consent.

'Good-bye ; I must be off,' said Mr. Dermot. 'You will have prayers without me to-day. I have no more time.'

Mirrie went out with him to the front-door, and his voice could be heard distinctly in the passage: 'Never mind ; it can't be helped. Very incapable—so different from Ethel. But Ethel always gave her mind to what she had in hand.'

Annis sat through prayers with tears of annoyance filling her eyes, and the meal following was somewhat silent. Breakfast over, Annis was hastening away, but Mrs. Dermot called her into another room.

'I don't want to hinder you, dear, if you are busy, but I must say a word. We can scarcely go on like this any longer. I think I had better take the housekeeping into my own hands.'

Annis bit her lips, gulped, and finally wept. 'For *one* mistake,' she said. 'But no one makes any excuses. Everyone is so hard upon me. As if I had not enough to do.'

'I think you have had a great deal too much to do, Annis. You have been looking quite pale

lately. And indeed it is not only one mistake. Your Papa and Håye and Percy are constantly complaining.'

'Captain Digby has no business,' murmured Annis.

'He pays well for his board, and has a right to expect to be made comfortable. Besides, he is thoroughly at home. And you give them good reason to find fault.'

'Mamma, it is only because I am not Ethel——'

'Ethel was a good housekeeper, but why should not you be the same? I assure you, Annis, I do really wonder at you,' added Mrs. Dermot gravely. 'You make a great profession of religion, and think much of teaching the poor, but you don't seem to care in the least what an unlovely thing you make religion seem among people of your own class. I have noticed a marked falling off in Con's inclination to seriousness since you came to live with us, and nobody but you ever seems to make Håye sneer at religion. Are you sure you are on the right tack?'

Annis had never in her life been more deeply mortified. She stood with her head bent, and her fingers squeezed together.

'I don't wish to say any more if it vexes you.

But I think you must give over the housekeeping to me. It is quite impossible that you should do well all you have undertaken.' No answer came yet. Pride and conviction were struggling for the mastery. 'Then we will consider it settled, and now you will have plenty of leisure for your outdoor work,' Mrs. Dermot said, turning away, but Annis grasped her dress.

'Don't go—please. Mamma, you don't think I have really—really hurt Con?'

'It is just what I say. She used to be the most serious of all my girls, and sometimes, when I have been alone with her on Sunday afternoons, we have had quite nice talks together. But I have noticed lately a falling off.'

'Not—because of me?'

'She said one day that you had been—you won't like the word, dear,—“preaching” to her, and she thought there was a great deal of hollowness in it all.'

Annis looked wretched. Once or twice her lips moved, though no sound came.

'I am not setting myself up as a judge,' said Mrs. Dermot. 'I had a different bringing up from you, and perhaps some things are good which I do not like; and other things may have harm in them,

though they have not seemed to me hurtful. But I do very plainly see the danger of making religion disagreeable in the eyes of those who don't know much about it.'

'Mamma—I did not know you cared——' Annis began involuntarily.

'Cared about what?'

'Cared—about—I thought you liked my sisters to be gay and worldly.'

'I do not call them so as a whole, certainly not Nina. Con has no chance. Ethel likes more gaiety than I could wish for her, but your father does not object, and I have not seen my way to restraining her.'

'Nina went to a ball some weeks ago.'

'Hardly a ball, though there was dancing. She begged me to excuse her, but your father was so set upon having both girls with him, that I really thought her duty was to obey. Perhaps you may think me wrong; but remember, Annis, there are more ways than one of being dissipated, and I have my doubts whether worldliness may not even creep into a prayer-meeting. You need not think I am defending balls, for I know the evils connected with them well enough.'

'Mamma, you don't care for prayer-meetings!'

‘Different people find different things a help. I have only been to two or three, and I did not care for the way in which they were managed.’

‘And you think I ought to give up all my work among the poor?’ asked Annis, with trembling lips, remembering Isabel’s late decision.

‘No, there is no need. If I undertake the house-keeping the difficulty is at an end.’

‘May I have two or three days to think it over?’ asked Annis, with her most mournful look.

‘If you like. But it is quite necessary that there should be a change. Your Papa has complained several times lately of the heavy bills. We are two less in household, yet expenses are scarcely, if at all, diminished.’

Annis gave up a meeting that morning which she commonly attended, and spent two hours in her room, tearfully regretting and considering. One fact stood out plainly before her. Whereinsoever she had been right, or whereinsoever she had been wrong, it was plain that she had failed to honour her Master’s Name in her own home. This deep failure weighed upon her heavily.

She did not know what to do. Should she throw aside at once the whole of her out-of-door work—classes, meetings, visiting? This would not ill



have accorded with her present mood, but she knew it might seem to savour of temper, besides being needless! Should she consult Mr. Futvoye? He might be loath to say what would tend to condemn his own daughter. Should she write and beg advice from Mr. Fenton? Her heart leapt at the thought, and a rush of home-sickness, and of longing for some blunt kind words from him, swept over her, but she could not bear to lower herself in his eyes. Should she write openly to Fanny Wayatt, seeking the benefit of her common-sense? Pride revolted at the thought of being led by Fanny's opinion. Then why not go to Fanny's mother?

That settled the matter. She sat down at once to pour out a long and eager epistle, detailing her difficulties and begging for help.

'I will be guided by what you say,' she wrote. 'What ought I to do or not to do? Should I throw up all this dear work of mine? Would that be right? For indeed, indeed, it cannot be all self-deceiving to think that God does use me, and that I have helped some poor wanderers to know about Jesus. Must I throw all that influence aside, only just that I may better order breakfast and dinner? The one seems so puny in com-

parison with the other. And yet—if I am doing harm to the great cause—oh, anything rather than that! Tell me what to do, dear dear Mrs. Wayatt. I feel very sad, very unhappy. Read what you like of this to Fanny, but don't tell her *quite* all that Mamma said to me. What shall I do about Con and about Captain Digby?

In answer, Mrs. Wayatt wrote :

‘MY DEAR ANNIS,

‘I am very busy to-day, but you beg for a speedy answer, so I must give you my first few and hasty thoughts on the subject of your letter.

‘You tell me you do not know what is *most* your duty, and say several things about “rival duties,” “incompatible duties,” “duties clashing,” and so on. These are unmeaning phrases. There is no question as to “most” or “least.” One thing each moment is your duty, and everything incompatible with that is not your duty. I grant you there is often a seeming rivalry, but that arises from the difficulty we find in deciding which is, and which is not, at a given moment, our duty.

‘If you look out the word in ‘an etymological dictionary, you will find yourself referred to “Due,”

explained as "that ought to be paid or done to another." Now that which we ought to pay to God is absolute obedience to His will. So the question of duty resolves itself into the question of—"What does God *will* me to do?" If one person lies in need here, and another person lies in need ten miles off, and each seems to have an equal claim upon me, still I know it cannot be God's will that I should attend to both at the same moment, however pressing the need. Then the question arises, "Which does He will me to attend to first?" There lies my duty.

'Do you remember St. Paul's prayer for the Colossians, that they "might be FILLED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS WILL in all wisdom and spiritual understanding," that they "might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing"? Many of us are sadly wanting in that knowledge, just, I suppose, because we don't "ask" more. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God,"—you know how it goes on. And also, I think we are apt to be much too fond of running after our own business, and calling it God's business, when we ought to be content to stand watching His eye and hand, till He gives the sign for action.

'But now to come to the point in your particular

case. I cannot decide for you, dear Annis. Looking on from outside, I cannot say decisively, "God wishes that you should do this, and God does not wish that you should do that." You must take your perplexities to the Master Himself, if you would know His will.

'Still, I may give you one or two hints in a general way.

'As to the housekeeping: you are the eldest daughter, Mirrie being too young to undertake it, and your mother too delicate. That you should risk making your mother ill, merely that you may have leisure to hold a few more classes or attend a few more meetings, is hardly to be thought about for a moment. I fancy you are pretty clear on that head.

'But you want to keep on both the housekeeping and the work among the poor, and do the best you can for each.

'Well, the question is, what would your "best" be in that case? Out-of-door work should never be allowed to interfere with home duties. If home duties compel you to give up out-of-door work, you may comfort yourself by remembering that God has many other workers in London besides Annis Dermot—many who can do that particular work

much better than you can do it. If you are not His chosen instrument, be content. But if out-of-door work makes you neglect home work, *then* you dishonour God.

‘Do not undertake more than you can do well. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth thee to do, do it with thy might.” Better do a few things well than a great many carelessly. Mind, I do not say you will never in this life have more *put upon you* than you are well able to accomplish. All I say is, don’t take it on yourself. If the Master extra-lades His servants, He can give extra strength.

“Do all to the glory of God,” and “Give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.” The one aim, you see, is to be the honour of His Name. Speaking and teaching *may* honour Him. Shining for Jesus in a holy blameless self-forgetting life *must* honour Him. Don’t neglect either, but especially don’t neglect the last, or the first becomes worthless.

‘I advise you to read carefully the last chapter of Proverbs—the picture of the “virtuous woman,” rising early, spinning, working, ruling with kindness and wisdom, looking well to the ways of her household. We can scarcely imagine that excellent woman feeling it her duty to neglect her

housekeeping that she might find time to teach the ignorant poor in neighbouring villages. The gain of influence among the poor would have been dearly bought by the loss of influence in her own home. So she simply did the work to which God had called her, and what she undertook she did thoroughly.

‘I do not know whether my letter will help you at all, dear Annis. Only I do entreat you to remember that any line of conduct which throws discredit on religion, which tends to make the Name of Jesus seem unlovely to those who do not know Him, must be utterly wrong.

‘With love from Fanny, and the same from myself, and much sympathy in all your difficulties,

‘Believe me,

‘Your affectionate friend,

‘F. WAYATT.’

## CHAPTER XIV.

### MORE OF THE DIARY.

*' March 4.*

' I HAVE not written of late in my journal, but I feel now inclined to take it up again, only I do not think I will send it to Fanny. A letter to her now and then does as well, and I find somehow that I cannot quite tell everything to Fanny, as I used to do. Does absence always have that effect? Or is it—is it—that I have learned some things about myself not easily spoken out even to a friend?

*' March 15.*

' Captain Digby has left us to-day, and the house feels quite dull without him. He has certainly been much pleasanter lately, and things have altogether gone more smoothly.

' I am sure Mrs. Wayatt's advice was right, though at the time her letter made me feel very unhappy, and I am afraid vexed. I fancied she would think

more of the importance of the work I might have to set aside. But I am glad now that I followed her advice so far as to give up some of what I had undertaken. Mr. Fenton once told me that I was in danger of not keeping enough time for feeding myself, as well as feeding others. He said that if nurses in hospitals follow that plan, taking no care of their own bodies, but spending every moment in attending to their patients, they end by breaking down. I think I was near a spiritual breakdown not long ago.

‘At all events, Captain Digby has nearly left off his little sarcastic remarks about religious work, since I have taken care to be punctual, and have tried to manage that the meals should be as he and Papa like. For the comfort and good temper of gentlemen certainly do seem to depend a great deal upon the manner of their eating. Mr. Fenton never cared in the least whether meat were overdone or underdone, but when I said so to Mirrie, she declared he must be the one exception to prove the rule. She thinks we women are superior to the men in that respect. But I am afraid some women are fussy about their eating too. I am sure Con is, only being such an invalid is her excuse.

‘I cannot but think her wrong to give way to



temper as she does. Of course she feels very poorly, and suffers very much ; still, there are many quite as ill, who always have a smile, and always seem contented.

‘Mr. Futvoye was speaking about her yesterday, when I happened to be with him, waiting for Isabel. He is fond of Con, and very kind to her. I said,

“ I wish she were a little more patient ; she would be so much happier.”

“ Ah, poor lassie,” he said ; “ you and I can’t judge. The Master knows how much she has to go through.”

“ But a little more self-command would be so much better,” I said.

“ It would be better for her friends, and make her less of a care,” said Mr. Futvoye. “ Folks of greater self-command don’t always suffer less, Annis, though they are pleasanter to nurse. Letting out of temper and weariness is a relief to the sufferer often.”

“ But then, it is not right,” I said.

“ No, it isn’t,” he said, with his beautiful smile. “ I often feel that, Annis. For, after all, we well folks know the meaning of temper and weariness, and we don’t always deny ourselves the relief of

letting out a bit, though we haven't the excuse of illness."

"You won't let me blame her," I said; "and I should be sorry to be hard upon poor Con. Still, I always feel that if I were in her place, I would rejoice to feel that if I might not work for Christ I could endure for Him—could honour Him by patience and gentleness."

"Maybe she does," he said. "I shouldn't wonder if Con had her rejoicing days."

"O no," I answered; "she is always talking about her uselessness, and wishing she were not a trouble; and yet it never seems to strike her that the real trouble is in her complaints and fractiousness."

"I dare say she sees all that more clearly than you think," said Mr. Futvoye. "Seeing where we are wrong isn't always followed by never doing the same again."

"Then you will not agree to one word," I said, giving it up. "And you think I must never blame Con."

"I wouldn't; it isn't needful," he said pleasantly. "Con has a hard battle, poor child. Some with stronger characters and firmer wills would suffer more and say less; and some with more grace could

shine for the Lord Jesus better. I think Con wants to shine for Him, but perhaps she is rather half-hearted still. And her illness is of a trying nature, very exciting to the nervous system."

'I must try to look upon Con more in Mr. Futvoye's spirit. She has been very unwell lately, and oh, so irritable. Some days we hardly know what to do with her. It wears Mamma out, and keeps us all in a worry, and nothing we can say or do pleases her. She is so annoyed, too, if one ventures on a word of blame. Perhaps she misses Ethel, and that makes her worse; but we do our best not to let her feel dull. She is very unreasonable at times. I do think that if Mr. Futvoye had her in charge for a month, he would not speak so placidly about her.

'Isn't it always like that? Mr. Futvoye can see where I am wrong. I can see where Con is wrong. Everybody can see where everybody else is wrong. And yet how hard it is to keep up to the mark ourselves!

*'June 8.*

'Such heat! I wonder whether it will last. Nina is expected home to-morrow, and I have just been seeing her room made ready. Now I may sit down for a few minutes to get cool.

'A week ago there came a letter from Ethel,

enclosing a cheque which she hoped would cover the expense of a month at Wildbad for Mamma and Con. Mamma of course must go to take care of Con, and we hope it will do her good also. Con was enraptured when the letter came.

‘But a little later in the day, Papa and Mamma told me that they doubted whether after all the plan could be carried out this summer. Ethel had sent as much as she could, but she seemed to have miscalculated the expense of such a trip. It would probably amount to double what she thought.

“Con will be terribly disappointed if she does not go,” I said, thinking my duty here seemed pretty clear.

“It may be only putting off for a few months,” Mamma said.

‘But I went straight out of the room, filled up a cheque for the same amount as Ethel’s, and came back. I did feel so pleased to be doing what I felt to be a real sisterly action. Papa seemed quite startled, and reminded me of the bills for the school-building that would soon be coming in; for I had heard from Collins Mead, and the school-house is all but finished.

“Yes, I have thought of that,” I said; “and I have quite made up my mind to use a few hundreds

of pounds out of my capital. I can't go on for another year without being able to give any help in my own home."

"Remember, you permanently injure yourself by using your capital," Papa said gravely.

'But I think I am right. The school-building was a hasty business—too hasty on my part. I ought to have waited to see what my home-calls would be, and how much I could really lay by each year. The loss of twenty or thirty pounds out of my income will be a small penalty to pay for my hastiness. I said something of this kind to Papa and Mamma, and they certainly both felt it a relief about Con and Wildbad.

*'June 10.*

'Nina arrived, as expected, the day before yesterday, and she seems delighted to be at home again. The six months abroad have changed her a good deal. She is slighter, and holds herself better, and the shy silent half-prim ways have quite gone. She talks easily and well now, though not with any inclination to mere chatter. She is certainly remarkably pretty, with those deep-blue eyes of hers, and such a brilliant colour.

"You are more like Ethel than ever," I said

to her, the first evening, and she looked quite surprised.

“Like Ethel! Do you think so? Nobody ever calls us alike. She is so much thinner than I am, and paler too.”

“Ethel thin and pale!” I repeated. “She must be very much changed. Does not France suit her?”

‘I thought Nina, for some reason, regretted her words. She hesitated a moment, and then remarked,

“Ethel says France is developing her into that style.”

“And is Ethel very happy?” I asked.

‘It seemed to me that Nina shirked answering the question. I wondered that nobody else showed any uneasiness; but it is the rule of the house to take things quietly. No one suspected anything, and I may be only fancying. I certainly did fancy at the moment that all was not right.

‘Nina had a great deal to tell about her own goings on, and her descriptions were very amusing. Papa laughed once, and said,—

“Our silent maiden has found her tongue abroad.”

‘That checked Nina for a while; but she really did not talk too much, and her animation made her

look so handsome that I could hardly take my eyes off her.

“And my girl is glad to come home again,” Papa remarked presently. “Not spoilt by dissipation, Nina?”

“O Papa, there is no place like home,” Nina said. “I only wished I could have brought Ethel too.”

“Poor Ethel,” several of us said; and Mirrie asked,

“How do you like the Count?”

“Not at all; I can’t bear him,” said Nina, and there was quite an outcry.

“Everybody wanted to know the reason.

“I didn’t see him often. I don’t think I have any very clear reason,” said Nina. “I only know I don’t like him, and Ethel doesn’t either.”

“Did she say so?” I inquired.

“She never would say much.”

“And a look came over Nina’s face, as if she felt it needful to be on her guard.

“How about Madame la Comtesse?” asked Mamma.

“O well, I did not see much of her, either,” hesitated Nina. “You see, Auntie and I lived a good three miles from the château. It seemed very seldom that Ethel and I could meet.”

‘And then she was told all about the Wildbad plan. Part she had heard from Ethel, but there were some fresh arrangements. It had been in my mind for a long while that I should like to be at the opening of the Collins Mead Schools. A few days ago, I heard Papa saying that Aunt Jane, living in Dorsetshire, had asked him to take Mirrie there for a month or six weeks, while Mamma and Con are away. He liked the idea much, for Mirrie has had no change for a long while ; but I saw they were puzzled about Nina. So I asked if Nina could not come with me to Collins Mead. Everyone is pleased with the proposal—Nina not least. I do not feel as I should once have felt about having her there.

*‘June 25.*

‘Mamma and Con left England yesterday for Wildbad, Papa going a part of the way with them. He comes back this evening, and to-morrow we all leave—Nina and I for Collins Mead, Papa and Mirrie for Dorsetshire, where they will be joined by Percy. He has been unwell lately, and went to a friend’s house near the sea for change.

‘My own true home. How long it seems since I was there. Memories come thronging up, till I hardly know where I am. And my dearest Aunt, my



other mother—how little I have thought about her the last few months. I do not understand this, and feel as if I had wronged her. Certainly I have been very busy. But still——

‘Well, she fills my heart and thoughts to-night.

‘And to-morrow, about this time, I hope to be driving through the old place, every wall and paling of which belongs to some part of my past life.

‘Then there are so many friends to see—Fanny and her mother not least among the number. Mr. Fenton—I wonder if I shall find him the same. But he is not a man to alter much—not a man to alter at all to his friends; so kind and true always.

‘It will be pleasant to introduce Nina to everything and everybody. I should feel lonely if I went by myself, and she is quite eager and excited with pleasure at being my companion. How much she has improved. Her manner to me has been very affectionate,—ever since she knew I wished to have her at Collins Mead. I almost think I must have been rather disagreeable to my sisters when I first came to London, though I am sure I did not mean to be so. But things are different now. I should like to have Con at Collins Mead, and Ethel and Mirrie too, some day.’

## CHAPTER XV.

### A LITTLE ADULATION.

‘THE bells! O Nina, the bells are ringing—the dear old bells!’

‘Rung in honour of your coming,’ suggested Nina, with a little laugh. ‘Or is this practising-night?’

Annis made no answer. She was leaning forward, with clasped hands, drinking in every detail of the familiar hedgerows. A brilliant summer evening welcomed her return, and while the blue sky scarcely showed a cloud, and the air was full of joyous insects, there came rich whiffs of hay-scent from left and right, where men and women tossed busily the drying grass. Carting had begun in certain parts. The two-miles drive from the station being now three-quarters over there were few among the labourers near at hand who did not recognise Annis, and many a sign of pleasure was given.

Turnpikes were not yet all demolished round about Collins Mead. At one particular turnpike, close upon the entrance of the village, a bend in the road revealed the school-children standing in neat rows, backed by a goodly number of village folks. As the fly stopped, the men burst into a cheer of welcome, and the children crowded round, flinging a shower of little bouquets upon the two sisters. Annis, tearful and smiling, shook hands eagerly with all whom she could reach, and a chorus of voices responded to this move—‘You’re welcome back—you’re welcome back, Miss Dermot;’ one woman adding pathetically—‘Don’t ‘ee go and leave us again now.’

‘I shall see you all, many many times, while I am here,’ said Annis huskily. ‘Thank you, thank you all.’ And the fly drove quickly on, Annis half-sobbing, half-radiant. Nina looked on with interest. ‘I suppose you used to teach in the schools,’ she said. ‘I can understand better now your feeling about this place.’

‘It is my home,’ said Annis. ‘Oh, look—there is the new school-house. And—Mr. Fenton.’

She told the driver to stop, and he came up for a warm hand-shake.

‘Welcome, right welcome, Miss Dermot. The

whole village is in a stir to-day. Did you see the children? I would not be there, for I wanted to see your first sight of the building. Your sister?'—and he raised his hat, as Annis made some sort of vague introduction. 'What think you of it? Have I fulfilled my trust wisely?'

'It is just what I wished—just what I have dreamed,' said Annis, gazing up.

'I must congratulate myself. To fulfil another's dream is an achievement. Well, I shall see you again to-morrow, when you open the school in state.'

'I!' said Annis.

'Nobody was content that anyone else should do it. Good-bye, good-bye, I must not detain you.'

And again they drove on.

'Is that the clergyman?' asked Nina.

'That is Mr. Fenton.'

'He looks—I should think he was a good man. Are the poor fond of him?'

'I think so, as a rule. He is very kind—ready to go to them at any hour. His whole time and energy are given to the parish.'

'That is only right—only what a clergyman ought to do,' remarked Nina.

'If all ought, I don't think all do,' said Annis.

A few more bows or nods to friends or villagers in passing, and Everest Cottage was reached. At the gate stood Fanny Wayatt, with a face of affectionate greeting. 'I am not coming in,' she said. 'You will see me in the morning. I only thought I would have one kiss.'

'You will take a cup of tea before you go,' said Annis, but Fanny was impervious to entreaties, and quickly escaped. Within the hall-door waited Bennet, all smiles and pleasantness, and Annis grasped her hand like the hand of an old friend. Past disagreements, uppishness or puttings-down, were forgotten for the nonce. Bennet wiped a stray tear from her eye, and followed Annis with looks of delight.

It was altogether just such a return home, and such a reception, as Annis would, with complete satisfaction, have pictured to herself, had she ventured beforehand to expect so much. She was greatly excited that evening, and the following day by no means lessened her excitement. There was a goodly gathering of gentry, and Mr. Fenton had been at pains to render the opening of the schools an unusually formal and festive event, in acknowledgment of Annis' return and of her services to Collins Mead.

So there were speeches and compliments, and thanks, and clapping of hands and rattling of sticks upon the floor; and the children were supplied with cake and buns; and the ladies and gentlemen took tea on the Parsonage lawn. Also, the new school-house was decorated with flowers and boughs, and somebody had been at pains to put over the door a 'Welcome to our Benefactor,' in green letters on a strip of white linen; and one semi-facetious speaker, pointing with his cane, drew attention to the Latin derivation of the word, caused a good deal of laughter by the suggestion that the termination 'tress' would have been more appropriate than the termination 'tor,' and tried to manage a little pun upon the same. Another speaker, with touching allusions to Miss Randolph, waxed enthusiastic over the self-denying devotion of Miss Dermot in the cause of others, and drew a graphic picture of the younger lady following in the older lady's steps.

All this might have been very pleasant, but the sense of self-importance engendered by finding herself a centre of attraction, was not over-good for Annis. I am describing no ideal heroine. Annis had her failings and her weaknesses. Many in her position that day would have felt rather humbled

than elated ; but the effect upon her peculiar cast of character was unhealthy. Always disposed to think too much about herself, the inclination was fostered by aught of prominence. Never rich in self-knowledge, the mere pleasure of being thus prominent drove out of her mind regrets and doubts as to her own haste in building the schools, and left only a sense of exultant self-satisfaction. There were some who marked this clearly in Annis ; and there were others who, without being able to say why, felt that something was not as it should be. To the former class belonged Mrs. Wayatt ; to the latter, Fanny Wayatt and Mr. Fenton.

Nina made her impression on people quite independently of Annis, and that a highly favourable impression. She kept well in the background, coming forward only when she could be practically useful ; but ready always for pleasant conversation. Her quiet self-possession stood in rather disparaging contrast with Annis' excitability.

'What will you like to do this morning, Nina ?' asked Annis, at breakfast, the day after the school-opening.

'Anything you like,' responded Nina. 'A country walk would be nice.'

‘Yes. Oh, I did not mean exactly that. *I* have plenty to do, of course—all my poor to visit, and my friends to see. Indeed, I really have more on my hands than I know how to get through.’

Nina suffered slightly from the sensation of being left out in the cold, but the sensation did not show in her manner. She took a piece of bread, remarking:

‘Then we had better be independent of one another.’

‘I am afraid you would hardly care to come with me. Otherwise, of course, I should be extremely glad to have you.’

Nina laughed inwardly at the important and ‘I-am-the-lady-of-the-house’ air which poor Annis had quite unconsciously assumed.

‘Where are you going?’ she asked.

‘To the schools, for instance. I may take a class for a short time. You would find that very dull.’

‘Not at all,’ said Nina promptly. ‘I should like very much to have a class too. I want to see everything while I am here.’

Annis had a secret sense of dismay. She did not wish for the slight check of her sister’s presence. The old feeling in this respect had come back to her.



‘And there is my district,’ she said. ‘That will take a great deal of time. You would be terribly tired of coming to one house after another, and listening to all the domestic troubles. You see *I* have a personal interest in the people, but you as a stranger——’

‘I should like it of all things,’ declared Nina. ‘It would be very amusing.’

Annis felt rather provoked.

‘I do not visit the poor for amusement,’ she said, with too serious an air of rebuke for the occasion.

‘There are different ways of being amused,’ said Nina, not in the least put out. ‘I am not joking, Annis, so don’t be afraid. I should like extremely to go with you, and if I get tired, I can but come home alone.’

Annis had no more excuses to bring forward. She could not exactly refuse her sister’s companionship, or insist upon leaving her in the house; but while dressing she indulged in a few regrets at having asked Nina at all to Collins Mead.

‘I am afraid I shall find it a great hindrance,’ she thought. ‘My poor people will expect so much from me, and yet I never find it so difficult to talk freely before anybody as before Ethel or Nina. She

will sit as stiff and silent as an automaton, I suppose, and criticise every word. I almost wish I could give up going to-day—but to-morrow will be as bad. I never dreamt of her wishing to visit among the poor.'

Two or three household matters having been attended to, the girls started together, Nina paying interested heed to village and landscape. Annis found herself obliged to talk whether she would or no, and her touch of ill-humour began to melt. Nina said once, with a degree of abruptness, 'Don't make any difference, please, for my being with you;' and Annis, after some hesitation, merely replied, 'You can go home, you know, at any moment when you are tired.'

There was no doubt about the affection with which Annis was regarded, or about the warmth of the welcome accorded to her by the children and parents alike, in school and in cottage. Annis was somewhat amazed, however, to find the same welcome extended in no very inferior degree to Nina. She decided at first that this was in compliment to herself, but could not help soon perceiving that Nina possessed power to captivate. The visit to the school was a success—only Annis' own attention being slightly distracted by Nina's animated

teaching in the next class, the attention of her children became distracted likewise, and Annis felt aggrieved. Going out of the school, Nina said brightly :

‘What nice children ! I felt so inclined, though, to talk French with them,’ and Annis made no answer.

Cottage-visiting came next ; and here also Nina acted in no automaton-like fashion. While Annis was engaged with one woman, Nina chatted to another ; or if there were no other, she made friends with the infants. Her lady-like and easy kindness won golden opinions. Annis could not understand it : Nina might have been a district-visitor all her life.

‘After all, vanity goes a long way, and Nina evidently wishes to be admired,’ thought Annis, while listening to the details of a certain woman’s home trials. Like many people, Annis was apt to be rather merciless upon her own failings when she saw, or thought she saw them in another. ‘She has certainly never been trained in visiting the poor, and looks upon it merely as a passing amusement.’

Annis found it needful to recall her attention to the present moment, there being a call for sympathy and advice. Nina was engaged in telling a

story to two small children, and Annis, feeling safe, launched into counsel. She very nearly came to an abrupt pause, on finding that the story had stopped, and that Nina was attentively listening, with two earnest eyes fixed on her face. Annis' disconcerted blush and hesitation made Nina turn away and talk again to the little ones, while she proceeded with lowered voice and restored ease.

On leaving the cottage, Nina remarked :

'I did not know you were talking secrets with Mrs. Grey, or I would have taken care not to overhear.'

'No, I—was not,' said Annis, confused.

'I liked so much what you were saying to her at that moment. But, of course, the poor are often confidential when they know you well enough.'

Annis felt ashamed, and at a loss how to answer. She wished she had had courage to show no hesitation. After a pause, she said :

'I should never guess you had seen nothing of the poor.'

'Of the English poor,' corrected Nina. 'Aunt and I visited a great deal among the French peasantry. She is such a good friend to them. But, of course, English ways are very different, so I am glad if I have managed rightly.'

Annis felt her surprise become less, but it cannot be said that she felt her pleasure become more. She did not quite approve of a rival in her own province. It was with no peculiar satisfaction, when visiting alone a day or two later in some of these same cottages, that she answered inquiries made by the women after 'that sweet pretty young lady, your sister, Miss Dermot.'

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A TRYING SITUATION.

‘STILL, I confess I was a little surprised, Fanny, at your saying so plainly before Captain Digby that you did not care for prayer-meetings.’

‘That I did not care for all—for some—was not that it?’ asked Fanny.

‘You implied that they were not what they ought to be. Now I always think, if I have not enjoyed a prayer-meeting, that the fault is in myself, not in the meeting.’

‘There’s a lesson in humility for you, Fan,’ said Mrs. Wayatt, with laughter in her soft eyes, though the lips below were grave. Annis was paying a visit alone to her friends.

‘But, Mrs. Wayatt——’

Annis paused, and Mrs. Wayatt looked inquiringly.

‘I was going to say—I don’t think you much like prayer-meetings.’

‘I like them in theory, my dear. Practically, I often find them a trial of patience—a disappointment, to say the least. When one good man stands up and pours out a studied oration to God, and a second kneels down and gives his friends an abstract of Christian doctrine, with a petition or two by the way—all I can say is that I don’t join, for there is nothing to join in. I may agree with what is said, though very often I don’t, but *that* is not united prayer. And when we meet together, nominally to pray for some particular object, and find the said object almost lost sight of in a multitude of general wants, what has been gained?’

‘I have noticed such mistakes—surely only mistakes,’ said Annis. ‘One does sometimes wish that good men would not pray so long, and would keep more to the point. Talking quietly here with you, I do not mind allowing so much. But what surprised me was that Fanny should speak just as openly when talking to a worldly man like Captain Digby.’

‘I do not see the difference. One must speak the truth either way,’ said Fanny.

‘One would not say what is not the truth. But that seemed to me such a confession of weakness—spoken to one on the enemy’s side.’

‘Captain Digby may possibly be at heart less of an “enemy” than you think. But—a confession of whose weakness?’ asked Mrs. Wayatt.

‘Why, weakness in the right cause.’

‘That sounds vague. Do you mean the cause of Christ, or the cause of prayer-meetings?’

‘I should identify the two.’

‘Then you make a great mistake. There is no weakness in the cause of Christ. There are weaknesses without number in the doings of His followers. Never be afraid to acknowledge the truth, even to a Captain Digby. He can’t help seeing the blunders and failures, and the last thing you have to do is either to deny or to sanction them.’

‘To sanction—no,’ said Annis.

‘But if you see something wrong, and he sees something wrong, yet in talking to him you defend it, what can he suppose but that you give it your sanction? I suspect a good many worldly people are repelled from religion by such means.’

‘But, Mrs. Wayatt—if you were speaking to some man of the world about an excellent Christian work of any kind, would you feel bound to pull up all its weak points and show them to him?’

‘No. But if he had noticed its weak points, I



would not defend them. I would say frankly, "Yes, such and such things are done in such and such a way, and I am sorry for the mistake of these well-meaning persons—only pray do not think my Master and Lord commanded such things to be so done." I would never dare, Annis, to saddle the Christianity of Christ with the foolishness of individual Christians.'

Annis looked thoughtful.

'There are blunders, weaknesses, mistakes, in everything that we do—in our home-life, our teaching of the poor, our witnessing for Him, and even in our Church services, though happily there we are not so dependent upon individuals as in a prayer-meeting. Our beautiful prayers, at least, cannot be touched.'

'I see you don't really like prayer-meetings, Mrs. Wyatt.'

'Then, my dear, you see what is not fact. I like them when they are what they profess to be. It is well that God's children should sometimes meet together for prayer informally, in addition to the regular services. I have enjoyed a prayer-meeting occasionally, though more often I come away disappointed and unrefreshed. The fault may be partly my own. I don't deny that. All I contend

for is, that where failures and blunders exist, you should not lay the burden of them upon the religion of Christ. But now I want to say something else to you. What a charming girl your sister Nina is. My younger children are delighted with her.'

'She is very attractive,' said Annis. 'Only, dear Mrs. Wayatt, is it not sad to see one with her gifts giving all her attention to this world?'

Mother and daughter exchanged glances.

'Why, Annis, surely you know her better than that?' said Fanny hastily.

'I know her better than you do, Fanny.'

'Do you find her open or reserved?' asked Mrs. Wayatt.

'Extremely reserved. It is her nature to be so. But if she had "the one thing," there could be no mistaking it.'

A visitor was announced, rather to Mrs. Wayatt's sorrow, as she would have liked to pursue the conversation. She had time only to lay her hand on Annis' arm with light pressure, and an earnest,—

'Don't be too sure; I do not believe things are exactly as you suppose.'

Then Annis took her leave, and found Nina at home waiting for a walk. Somehow, Annis felt disinclined for conversation. This warm apprecia-

tion of Nina among her old friends aroused mixed feelings, not all of which were pleasurable. She liked Nina to be appreciated, but she did not like to find herself in any wise cast into the shade.

‘What a very good man Mr. Fenton is!’ Nina broke out unexpectedly, when they had trudged through three or four fields, indulging in few remarks by the way.

‘Very,’ said Annis. ‘What makes you think of him just now?’

‘He came to the house while you were out, and I happened to be in the garden, so he stayed for a little while—a good while, I mean. It was very good of him, for he must have a great deal to do.’

‘He is extremely busy, always in a hurry,’ said Annis.

‘Is he? I should not have thought that of him. I do not like people who live in a bustle. But he did not seem in a bustle to-day.’

‘Not exactly a bustle, but he always has so much work on hand. What did you talk about?’

‘Several things.’

‘Parish matters?’

‘No, not much. We talked about flowers, and scenery, and what sort of poetry we each liked best, and—and about how one is to be good.’

‘How one is to be good!’ repeated Annis.

‘Yes. I think he must be one of the most really good men I ever saw.’

Nina sprang aside, and knelt down on the grass.

‘Oh, you lovely little speedwell, I must pick some of you,’ she said. ‘I love your blue stars.’

Annis followed her with a—‘But, Nina, do you mean——’

Nina had evidently no intention of renewing the subject. She flitted from one flower to another, exclaiming on the beauty of the grasses; and Annis pursued her in vain.

‘Where does that pretty lane lead?’ Nina asked eagerly, as they reached a stile. ‘Oh, let us go down it.’

‘Well—we might,’ debated Annis slowly. ‘It would be a good round, but we could return by the large field at the back of the Vicarage. It is a pretty walk.’

‘And nobody is waiting for us. No harm if we are late,’ said Nina.

A pleasant breeze kept the day from being too oppressively hot, and the girls really enjoyed their ramble. Annis had rarely seen her sister so overflowing with spirits; yet though the spirits were

high, they were perfectly natural, never forced, and never unladylike in their vent.

Laden with wild flowers and ferns, they reached at length the field behind Mr. Fenton's house, and having climbed the stile, proceeded along the path which crossed diagonally.

'I wish we had gone another way,' Annis remarked. 'There are so many cows here. I never saw them put in this field before—at least not before this summer. I had forgotten about them.'

'Oh, well, you are country-bred, so you don't mind cows,' said Nina. 'And I am not a coward, in spite of being town-bred, so you need not think of me.'

Annis had thought of herself, but she felt ashamed to confess feelings of cowardice, and went on without another word, casting nervous glances at the numerous horned animals to the right and left of the pathway ahead. She would have greatly preferred to creep round by the hedges, in ignominious style, but Nina marched steadily on, and Annis did not like to suggest such a plan. She said presently:

'Do walk quietly, please; don't run. We shall have some of the cows after us.'

'Why, do you mind cows?' asked Nina. 'I

thought country people never did. I only ran for this flower, so as not to keep you waiting, but I'll take care. What a pretty face the brindled one has, with the lovely eyes !'

Annis could admire better with a separating distance between. She walked irregularly, now hurrying on, in her eagerness to be out of the field ; now slackening speed, lest the cows should be incited to run a race. The larger group was passed through, and Annis breathed more freely, for the second stile lay not very far ahead, when her eyes lighted upon an object that caused her to turn white and clutch at Nina's arm.

'What is the matter ?' asked Nina.

'The—the—the bull !'

Annis could scarcely gasp out the words, and Nina felt her own heart give a violent throb. For there stood under the shade of a few small trees, apart from the rest of the herd, a big black thick-necked creature, whose long horns, lowered head, and suspicious gaze were the reverse of pleasant.

'He is looking at us. He will run,' panted Annis.  
'Oh, come !'

Nina grew pale, but lost nothing of her self-possession.

‘Don’t seem frightened—don’t scream. Walk quietly—not fast.’

She held Annis’ two hands in a firm clutch, and retreated with deliberation, keeping watch upon the enemy.

‘Nina, he is coming—oh, he is coming! We must run!’

‘If we do he will make a rush at once, and we shall never reach the stile. Quietly—very quietly.’

Annis was in an extremity of terror, shaking all over, and hardly able to draw her breath. Nina’s firm hold never loosened. Step by step they withdrew, and the bull came after them. He walked slowly as yet, seeming uncertain as to his own intentions, but the lowered horns and angry eyes showed the said intentions to be at least not amicable. Each moment the distance between pursuer and pursued grew less.

‘We must run—it is our only hope,’ hoarsely muttered Annis.

‘He will be on us in a moment if we do,’ calmly replied Nina.

‘O no—the stile is near. We should just have time. I am sure. Nina—I *must*.’

The stile was near, but the enemy was nearer.

It flashed across Nina that if both could not escape, one might. She saw that Annis' terror was becoming ungovernable.

'Then you must be quick—and quietly, mind, Annis—quietly. Never mind me.'

Loosening her grasp, the heroic girl made one step sideways, thus placing herself between her sister and the bull, and fixed her eyes full upon him with a stern rigid stare. Her limbs did not tremble or her eyelids quiver. She felt almost as if turned to stone. Annis fled wildly, sprang to the top of the stile, and fell over on the other side, bruising herself considerably. She sprang up, however, in horror at her sister's situation. The bull had made a half-dash forward, but stopped as if paralysed by the motionless figure in his path.

'Nina, come—come!' screamed Annis.

But Nina knew well that to turn might be death. She dared not even speak. Annis looked on in despair, and pictured the possibility of returning to her sister's side, but found her nerve unequal to any such act of self-sacrifice. Her next move was to rush for help, and happily it lay not far off. Twenty paces distant, at the next turn of the lane, she came into rough collision with Mr. Fenton.

'I beg your pardon,' he exclaimed. 'Eh? what?



anything wrong?' and Annis could only say—  
'Nina!' pointing breathlessly towards the stile.

He was there in an instant, and had one clear view of things as they were; a view he would not easily forget. It was a sight to see,—that young girl, with determined calm in her white face, by sheer force of will in her fixed blue eyes keeping off the vexed restless brute in her front. He saw thus much, as he crossed the stile with a single leap, and applied his stout walking-stick so lustily to the creature's sides as to induce a hasty retreat.

Nina did not move a finger till he came to her, and then she held his arm convulsively.

'Brave girl!' he said in admiration. 'But all is well now. Farmer Smith has no business to keep that vicious fellow in a public field. I shall make a stir in the matter. Can you get over the stile, do you think?'

'If you please—yes——'

He helped her carefully to the other side, and then looked with solicitude on her colourless lips.

'Miss Dermot, your sister is over-strained. We must take her indoors, and let her rest before going home.'

'O no—it does not matter,' said Nina, speaking with difficulty under the strong shivering which

assailed her. 'I—I did not know how frightened I was. It is very—silly.'

'I can't think how you could face that creature,' said Annis, with a shudder. 'It was horrible.'

'Come through my back-garden. That is the shortest way,' said Mr. Fenton. 'Can you walk, if you lean on my arm? You would like to get out of sight of this place. Don't talk yet,—you will soon be better. Were not you in the field, Miss Dermot?'

'We were together,' said Annis, colouring, and feeling that she had not acted in heroine-wise. 'It was in the middle of the field that we first saw the bull looking at us, and I am sure I never had such a fright in my life! But indeed, Nina, I never dreamt of leaving you behind. I thought of course you would run with me.'

'We could not both——'

Nina's voice and powers failed suddenly together. The mere mention of the subject turned her sick, though she would not say so. Mr. Fenton placed her on a rustic garden-seat with back and arms, and hurried into the house, whence he quickly returned with a tumbler in his hand, and the matronly housekeeper following in his rear.

'Drink this, Miss Dermot.'

Nina obeyed dreamily, just in time. She would have been unconscious in a few more seconds. The remedy took effect, and, though looking white as a sheet still, she was able soon to sit up and smile.

‘Dear, dear, dear me, it *is* a business,’ said the housekeeper. ‘Why, the young lady ought to be a soldier, sir, that she ought. Miss Dermot’s sister don’t take after Miss Dermot, anyway. She always *was* afraid of cows.’

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A DEPOSED HEROINE.

'MISS DERMOT' became keenly conscious in the course of the next few days that 'Miss Dermot's sister' was the heroine of Collins Mead. Everybody heard the tale of the bull, and everybody commented on it. Everybody was anxious to become acquainted with the spirited girl who had kept the horned animal at bay. There were a good many whispered strictures on Annis' flight; though lady-friends, as a rule, were disposed to think themselves more likely to have acted Annis' than Nina's part.

Annis went through some varying phases of feeling. She was at first remorseful for the danger in which Nina had been, and ashamed of her own loss of self-control. Then she began to find it a little difficult to conform to people's praises of Nina and delighted interest in her. Finally she became annoyed.

‘One hears of nothing but Nina and the bull nowadays,’ she said peevishly to Fanny Wayatt. ‘And after all, nobody can tell that he meant to hurt her. He may have merely followed us out of curiosity.’

‘Mr. Fenton does not think so,’ said Fanny. ‘Why, Annis, you must be quite proud of such a brave sister. I should feel so in your place. Mr. Fenton is not at all a man to conjure up imaginary danger, or to encourage nervousness.’

‘Nina was brave, of course,’ said Annis, with wrinkled brows. ‘Still one does get tired of the incessant talk on the subject.’

‘Mr. Fenton may be a little bewitched by the heroine of the adventure, my dear,’ said Mrs. Wayatt to her daughter.

The words were uttered designedly. Mrs. Wayatt had a purpose in so speaking. She glanced up in the silence that followed, and saw Annis, with a face like a peony, looking on the ground.

‘I should not fancy him a man to be easily bewitched,’ said unobservant Fanny, picking out a yellow star in her worsted-work.

‘All the more likely to be thoroughly bewitched when his turn comes,’ said Mrs. Wayatt. ‘Did you say your father was coming here soon, Annis?’

'Early next week,' Annis answered, still keeping her eyes downcast, as she played nervously with her parasol. 'He will stay with us for a week, before taking us home.'

'I am glad of that. He ought.'

The words were simple, yet meaning lay below.

'And I am pleased to hear that you can call London your home, my dear,' added Mrs. Wayatt kindly.

'Oh, I don't know—one gets into the habit without thinking,' said Annis listlessly.

'Annis, you have seemed over-done ever since your fright in the field,' said Fanny. 'And yet Nina is none the worse for it.'

'I am quite well,' replied Annis, rather shortly. 'So is Nina.'

She took advantage of a short silence to rise and leave. Fanny sat fidgeting with worsted and needle after her departure.

'Mamma, do you think Annis is quite what she used to be?'

'I see little difference. The same character in different circumstances.'

'But she used to seem such a happy Christian.'

'There are certain trials in her present life which in old days she had not to endure.'

‘Yes—I suppose——’ Fanny paused with a dissatisfied look. ‘I suppose so. But that does not explain the change. She used to say so much about glorifying God in trouble. I have heard her wish she had more troubles that she might be able to glorify Him better.’

‘A rash wish! It is almost like venturing to pray, “Lead me into temptation.”’

‘And of course talking is easier than doing,’ murmured Fanny. ‘Then you don’t count that Annis has really gone back?’

‘I see no need to think so. It looks to me rather as if she were passing through a sifting-time—a winnowing process.’

‘I thought that meant trouble,’ said Fanny slowly. ‘Has Annis any great troubles? To be sure she often talks of her trials—“unexampled trials” she called them the other day. But I fancied that was only her way.’

‘You may make some allowance for her style of expression. Some people talk of unexampled trials if they have a bad tooth-ache, or a troublesome housemaid. However, I think Annis really is troubled just now—perhaps more in some ways than she quite knows. There are some kinds of heart-pain, springing partly from feelings not right

though very natural, which people are slow to take to God. If Annis is bearing any of her trials alone, no wonder she finds them heavy.'

Fanny evidently understood in some measure.

'I think Annis is rather jealous of Nina,' she said, in a low voice.

But to that Mrs. Wayatt made no answer. She knew Fanny's critical tendency, and would not encourage it.

Meanwhile Annis, walking somewhat drearily homewards, came upon Mr. Fenton and Nina at the garden-gate, in close conversation. His bent head wore an air of interest, and Nina was speaking softly. Annis flushed again, and felt a certain hardness creep into the muscles of her face. She walked straight on, and would have passed by, had not Mr. Fenton turned and shaken hands.

'How do you do? How do you do? Very glad to see you looking so blooming—quite recovered from your alarm, I hope. Your sister has not lost her paleness yet. I am sorry to hear she does not sleep well at night.'

'She did not tell me,' said Annis coldly.

'Ah, I dare say it will pass off soon. She could not have a better care-taker than you. But I must say good-bye to you both. No more time to waste.



I'll send you that little book, Miss Dermot.' Annis looked up, but found his eyes fixed upon Nina. 'You will find it worth reading, very instructive. Good-bye, good-bye.'

The sisters went up the garden together, as he strode away.

'What has Mr. Fenton been here for?' asked Annis.

'I don't know. He was only passing, I think. I came back from a little walk, and found him looking at the white rose by the gate.'

'And you stayed out to talk to him?'

'Yes. He seemed to wish it. Why not?'

Annis bit her lip furiously, and said no more till the house was reached.

'What did you mean by telling Mr. Fenton that you slept badly?'

'I did not say that.' Nina looked perplexed at the tone. 'He asked a good many questions, and I was obliged to say that I woke up often in a fright, fancying I saw that creature's eyes glaring at me. It is silly, of course. I don't so much now as at first.'

'I should not have thought you looked poorly.'

'I am not.' Nina entered the drawing-room, pulled off her hat, and threw herself into an easy-

chair. 'I am not poorly. Annis, I think you have had enough of me, and want me to go home.'

Annis hesitated, and then said :

'Nonsense. Papa comes next week, and we shall soon all go together.'

But she saw that instead of having allayed Nina's feeling of being unwelcome in the house, she had deepened it. The evening passed silently, both of them reading, or writing letters. One envelope of Nina's was addressed to her father, and three days brought from him an answer, to wit that he was coming to Collins Mead half-a-week sooner than he had intended, and would only stay two nights. If Annis preferred to remain in Collins Mead until the date originally named, he had no objection.

Annis fumed somewhat over this, wrote a protest which took no effect, and questioned Nina rather sharply as to what she had said. Nina did not enter into particulars. 'I thought I had been here long enough,' was her only answer. Annis had many fluctuations as to whether or no she would stay the extra week ; common-sense pulling one way, and inclination the other. Wisdom in the end yielded to will, and Nina paid farewell visits alone.

Mr. Fenton heard from Annis herself of the change of plans. Happening to meet him when Nina was not present, she let it drop with seeming carelessness, and his look of dismay was only too plain.

‘Well, well, I shall see you all again—shall see you all soon, no doubt,’ he said.

‘I shall be here a week longer,’ Annis remarked.

He did not heed this. It came home sharply to Annis that her going or staying was nothing to him, beyond the going or staying of fifty other friends. She knew also that what he felt in the matter was far from being nothing to her. A bitter feeling against Nina crept into her soul—not against Nina only, but against Mr. Fenton too.

‘And it all comes from my kindness,’ thought Annis. ‘I wish I had not asked her here. I wish, oh how I wish I had come alone! I should have been ten times happier. She has spoilt everything.’

‘You are going home, Miss Dermot. I will come your way. I should like a few words with you.’

‘If you wish,’ said Annis coldly.

The ‘few words’ seemed not easy to utter. He made several beginnings, stopped short each time,

looked embarrassed, and finally plunged into confused thanks to Annis for something, he did not clearly say what. 'Such a pleasure to everybody,' was repeated more than once, and then a direct reference to Nina made Annis observe :

'Yes, she is very popular.'

'Mere popularity—no, not that. But she wins her way with everybody. I assure you Collins Mead rings with her praises.'

Annis made no answer. He changed his tone suddenly.

'But you know all I would say. Miss Dermot—do you think?—is it possible?—can you give me hope?'

The low voice made Annis' heart leap, and yet she knew he was not thinking of herself.

'Can you give me hope?' he repeated. 'Shall I be wise to speak to Mr. Dermot at once, or—or—should I wait? May I beg for your advice, your influence? I am asking for once a personal favour from our parish benefactor.'

He smiled, though in an anxious manner, and Annis felt as if she had suddenly become encased with ice.

'You had better speak to my father yourself,' she said.

‘Of course, of course—but your influence——’

‘I do not see what I can do in the matter.’

‘Still, at least—at least—you don’t count it hopeless?’

‘No,’ was all she could say.

‘Thank you, thank you——’ and he grasped her hand. ‘You are a friend indeed. When does your father arrive?’

‘About five o’clock.’

‘Ah, yes; then I may look in upon you in the course of the evening, just to renew my acquaintance with him. Only look in—not to speak to-night. I may speak in the morning.’

Annis stood still at the gate.

‘I must say good-bye, Mr. Fenton.’

He shook her hand again, heartily.

‘No need to ask if I have your approval. You know your sister too well to hesitate. Her Christian beauty of character——’

‘Nina is reserved with me,’ said Annis stiffly. ‘I have always counted her well-disposed, but certainly not decidedly a Christian.’

She would have given worlds the next instant to unsay her words, knowing how they would sound in his ears.

He looked hard at her in surprise, merely said :

‘She must be reserved with you, indeed!’ lifted his hat, and walked away.

Annis fled to her own room, double-locked the door, and struggled long with a raging paroxysm of sobs. Her one wish was that Nina should not hear her, and that no traces of tears should remain in her face. The pain of disappointment and passion of jealousy were almost more than she could bear; and beyond and above both lay a sense of bitter failure and humiliation. Where was her trust? where her resignation? where her willingness to bear sorrow? where her power to glorify God in the fires? She only knew that all seemed gone; only felt herself to be a stray leaf beaten about shelterless in the wind. For a while she thought she could not go downstairs to Nina, could not welcome her father, could not again meet Mr. Fenton. But womanly pride came to her help. Anything rather than that the truth should be guessed.

Mr. Dermot on coming in was disposed to think his girls not much better in looks for their change. Nina was pale still; while Annis, with heavy eyes and nervous manner, seemed labouring under suppressed excitement.

‘I am afraid you have not quite recovered from

your adventure yet,' he said. 'Nina doesn't look like facing wild beasts this evening.'

'Oh, I am all right,' Nina said brightly. 'How is Mirrie?'

'Well; and not going home till next week. So you and I will have the house to ourselves for a few days—unless Annis prefers to accompany us.'

'Annis has settled to stay here,' said Nina, anticipating her sister. 'Papa, Con seems really better for the baths?'

'Yes, and Mamma finds another ten days of them possible, thanks to Annis. How have you both got on?'

'It is a lovely place,' Nina said, 'and everybody so kind.'

'You seem to have seen a good deal of the clergyman, Mr. Fenton.'

Both girls blushed. Mr. Dermot scented mischief, but knew not in which direction. 'Time enough I should come,' he thought.

'Mr. Fenton is always in and out about the village,' observed Nina. 'One can't well take a walk and not meet him somewhere. Papa, you know him?' The question came timidly.

'Well, yes, enough to like him,' said Mr. Dermot.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A WEEK ALONE.

‘I WISH your mother were here,’ said Mr. Dermot, in a perplexed tone, being alone with Annis.

Annis could guess why.

‘He is a good fellow, I am sure,—kind-hearted, and all that. Not bad prospects either. I really don’t see anything against it. And the child is undoubtedly touched.’

Annis was seated in an advantageous position, half sheltered by the window-curtain. She forced herself to say :

‘Nina, do you mean?’

‘Yes. Mr. Fenton has just been here—he seems thoroughly in love with her, and really expressed himself very sensibly, very warmly. I like the man. No cant about him, and one can’t doubt his sincerity. If your mother makes no objections, I am sure I shall make none.’

‘Do you suppose——’ Annis began.



‘No, I don’t think it likely. I don’t know why she should. The living is only two hundred a year, certainly; but then he has private property which brings him in two hundred and fifty, and the likelihood of more being left him by-and-by. Can you say anything as to your sister’s feelings?’

‘No,’ said Annis hastily. ‘Is he going to speak to Nina?’

‘Well, no, not till I hear from your mother—better not—though I don’t doubt what she will say. But for my part I feel pretty sure as to the child herself.’

Annis was silent.

‘One can’t avoid seeing her manner, and she is very transparent. Just the girl for a clergyman’s wife—so good and hard-working. I wish he could speak to her at once. But too much haste isn’t a good thing. Just as well that we are leaving to-morrow. A few days’ separation will do neither of them any harm, though no doubt he feels the uncertainty, poor man. In fact I would rather have Nina out of his way till I hear from your mother, and then he can come to London. Think of Nina being the first fledgeling to take flight—though it isn’t certain yet. But I don’t know what my elder

girls are after. Why, I always expected *you* to marry Mr. Fenton.'

'Thank you,' said Annis, with an attempt at scorn.

'Not that you and he would have suited one another ; you are both too positive. Nina can be firm, but she is not positive. I hope she will be happy, if it comes about. Poor little woman !'

He was too much excited to sit still, and roved about incessantly, while Annis felt as if she had no energy left to do aught but lie and dream. Lying and dreaming were not possible that day. She struggled somehow through all that had to be done, saw to the housekeeping, headed the table, talked as much as was needful, made arrangements for the departure of her father and sister on the following day. Mr. Fenton was in and out frequently on one pretext or another, and she endured to watch her father's growing approval of him, and *his* disregard of everybody and everything except Nina.

The long stretch came to an end at last. The fly drove away, and Annis stood at the window, suddenly awaking to the fact that she ought to have gone too. What business had she in Collins Mead at that moment ? None certainly in the parish ; for visiting there implied meeting Mr. Fenton, and

to meet Mr. Fenton was the one thing which she felt she could not do. 'I can't see him! I can't see him!' she murmured inarticulately, wringing her hands together. 'Oh, why didn't I go, and never come back? But he will be in London soon. It is all the same—all misery—whether I go or stay.'

Then she went heavily up to her own bedroom, and laid herself down on the bed, and thought she would never care to stir again.

Bennet found her thus an hour later, and showed concern. Was anything the matter? Was Miss Dermot ill? Couldn't she get something?

'No, no—nothing. I only want to be quiet,' Annis answered.

'You've had too much to do of late, Miss Dermot. And I do believe you've never quite shook off the fright you had with that there bull.'

'Perhaps not. I am tired,' said Annis faintly. 'I shall rest for a day or two. Don't let anybody in.'

'Except Miss Wayatt,' suggested Bennet.

'No, no; not Miss Wayatt, nor anybody. I must be quite alone. You understand. I don't care who comes, I can't see anybody. You can go now, Bennet. I only want to be quiet.'

Bennet withdrew, and outside the door nodded her head mysteriously three times.

‘I’m not so easy took in—no! I’ve got eyes in my head, and I can use them too, and that’s a mercy. Well, I wouldn’t say a word against Miss Dermot; but for all that, Miss Nina is a sight the prettiest and affablest of the two, and I don’t wonder, no I don’t, that he sees it. He’s a wise man, and she’ll make him a good wife and no mistake. Folks did think it would come to that with Miss Dermot, but I didn’t. Not as I’d have minded Mr. Fenton for my master. They do say he’s uncommon easy, and never gives a sharp word to a servant without it’s for deceit and lying. But plain enough it isn’t to be.

‘Let Miss Annis be quiet! But I ain’t going to let her fret herself ill, not for nobody. I’ll leave her to-day and maybe to-morrow, and if she don’t look up again by then I’ll call in Mrs. Wayatt.’

Annis knew nothing of Bennet’s thoughts, and little imagined how quickly her secret had been seen through by one sharp pair of eyes. She lay for hours that day upon her bed, yielding herself up to the grasp of a despairing listlessness. Why should she struggle against it? There seemed nothing now worth doing, nothing worth living for.

She knew this state of mind to be wrong, yet made no effort to resist. Bennet could only get her down to meals by threatening to call the doctor, and when down she ate little. Between whiles the hours were passed in a condition of dreamy inaction.

So passed two days, and a third began in like manner. Bennet waited so long, excusing her to all visitors. But on the afternoon of the third day she put on bonnet and shawl, and went straight off to Mrs. Wayatt's.

Half-an-hour later there came a slight rustle beside the bed, where Annis lay with shut eyes, and a voice said cheerfully :

‘Why, my dear child, what is the matter?’

Annis started up to a sitting posture, as if she had received an electric shock, and her face flushed scarlet.

‘Bennet, you are very wrong,’ she said angrily. ‘I told you to let no one in.’

Mrs. Wayatt was really relieved to find energy enough for displeasure. Bennet's description, following upon Annis' persistent refusal to admit visitors, had rather alarmed her, and the first glimpse of a haggard face had not proved reassuring.

‘I am too old a friend to be kept out,’ she said kindly. ‘What is it all about, Annis?’

Annis threw herself back on the bed, and closed her eyes again.

‘I am not well—I can’t talk,’ she said. ‘I only want to be quiet.’

‘What did you have for dinner to-day?’

‘I can’t eat.’

‘Bennet, will you kindly bring a cup of tea and some toast?’ said Mrs. Wayatt. ‘I suspect Miss Dermot’s nerves have been overwrought, and she wants doctoring up.’

‘I can’t eat. If you would *please* leave me——’ murmured Annis, with broken sobs.

‘No, my dear. Does your head ache?’

‘N—o,’ said Annis. ‘I don’t have headache.’

‘Do you feel faint? Have you pain anywhere? Nothing but fatigue?’ as a faint negative answered each question. ‘Come, I do not call that very bad. I am tired too, sometimes, but I don’t shut out all my friends for three days in consequence. You feel what?——’ at some smothered sounds. ‘Weak and nervous? Yes, no doubt. Want of nourishment and hot weather are quite enough to account for such feelings. Food and fresh air will soon brighten you up. Fanny thinks you have quite overdone

yourself since you came her. Let me feel your pulse. So—wait—O come, I don't call that a bad pulse. A little weak from starving ; nothing more. You must never starve for nervous fatigue, you know. It is the worst plan imaginable.'

'I can't eat,' said Annis mournfully.

'Why not?'

'I am not hungry.'

'If you can't eat because you are hungry, you must eat because it is good for you.'

Then they waited in silence till the tea came ;—Annis hardening herself to resist the while.

'I *can't*,' she said, when the tray arrived.

'Come off the bed, Annis, and sit in the arm-chair. The breeze will reach you there.'

The proposal took Annis by surprise, and Mrs. Wayatt's hand on hers seemed to take compliance for granted. Annis found herself crossing the room, before she had time to think about the matter. Seated in the easy-chair, with a fresh breeze blowing in through the open window, she really did look white and ill. Lack of food and indulgence in misery had brought her low. She burst into tears, and said :

'Oh, it is cruel ! I am not fit to be up.'

'This will do you good, Annis.'

The offered cup was put aside somewhat petulantly. 'I can't,' sobbed Annis.

'Then you must have a glass of wine instead, and some bread-and-butter.'

'No—no—nothing——'

'Very well.' Mrs. Wayatt took a seat beside her. 'Bennet, will you kindly go at once to Mr. Franks, and ask him to come here. I shall not leave till he has been.'

Annis' helpless languor gave way, and she sat upright.

'O no, no—not the doctor. I can't see him.'

'One of the two, Annis,' her friend said quietly.

Annis sighed deeply, but yielded. Cup and plate soon stood empty, and to her own surprise she secretly found no difficulty in disposing of either tea or toast. Mrs. Wayatt made no remarks, but sent Bennet for a fresh supply of each; and the greater part of these also vanished.

'Thank you, Bennet; we shall not want any more,' she said cheerfully. 'I will stay with Miss Dermot for an hour.'

Bennet withdrew, and Annis looked shamefacedly at her friend.

'I am afraid—I am afraid you think me very silly——'



‘I know what nerves are,’ said Mrs. Wayatt.

‘But indeed, I did feel——’

Annis broke off, leant back, and gazed on the floor.

‘Ill—or unhappy?’ asked Mrs. Wayatt.

The last word brought a start and flush. Mrs. Wayatt went on hastily :

‘Fanny and I have not thought you looking lately so bright as you used to do.’

‘I have been——’ and a pause.

‘Little home trials sometimes press heavily,’ said Mrs. Wayatt. ‘You find that, don’t you?’

Annis’ ‘Yes’ was uninterested.

‘I have thought once or twice that at your age, and in your place, I might have had rather a struggle to feel quite as I ought to feel about the position Nina took here.’

‘I don’t mind. It is natural that people should admire her,’ said Annis.

‘Many things are natural which we find rather trying. But if you could be heartily pleased for her sake, I admire you for it, dear Annis. It is only right that you should.’

A flush came into Annis’ face, and pride fought with honesty, but did not conquer. The sense of failure and humiliation, which had pressed upon

her through many days past, came rolling up in a wave of double strength. She laid her head down upon the arm of the chair, and broke into a passion of weeping.

Mrs. Wayatt said nothing at first, letting sorrow have its way. But presently an arm came round Annis, lifting her head gently.

‘Come, Annis—what need for all this?’

‘It is all true—oh, it is all true,’ she said bitterly. ‘I have gone wrong, and only thought of myself. Nobody loves me now as I used to be loved.’

“*I have loved thee with an everlasting love,*” was the low answer.

‘Oh, I don’t deserve that He should. I haven’t thought of His honour—only of being liked and praised——’

‘Always?’

‘O no. After I went to London, I think,—and much more since I came here. If only I had never left Collins Mead!’

‘You had no choice. God had some purpose in taking you away.’

‘O no; I used to think so, but it is impossible. If you did but know—how it has all been blunder and failure and doing harm.’

‘Less so, perhaps, than you think. But blunder

and failure on your part would not touch the intention of God in sending you there. His purpose may have been not so much to give you active work for Him, as to teach you more of yourself.'

Annis cried silently, with hidden face.

'But I used to feel so differently,' she said. 'All seemed right then—all as it should be—and serving Him was so bright and easy.'

'I would not be too sure that all was right because all seemed right. It may be a question how much of the "bright and easy" service was purely God's service, and how much of it was self-pleasing.'

'Oh, you don't mean that really,' said Annis, startled. 'I could not bear to think it.'

'It is a sorrowful thought—but it *may* have been so. God may have wished to open your eyes to the truth.'

Annis sat up with clasped hands and blistered face.

'Mrs. Wayatt, you don't think that I was not really His child all the while.'

'I don't so much question that. I am inclined to believe that in those days Annis Dermot considered herself rather a greater saint than others thought her to be. I think the humbled Annis of

this moment may be the nearer Christ,' she added softly.

'O no—if you saw into my heart—I am not near——'

'Then perhaps as yet it is only—"I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Thy servant, for I do not forget Thy commandments." You see it was "like a lost sheep," and yet "Thy servant" still.'

Annis gave a faint smile, and then sighed drearily.

'I feel as if I should never care for anything again,' she said.

'Why not?'

Annis coloured, and wished she had said less.

'Something else in addition to the trouble we have been talking about?'

'I have troubles,' said Annis. 'Some—some that I could not tell you.'

'And those of course seem the heaviest. But there is One to whom you can tell all. Don't dishonour Him in trouble by talking of having no interest in life, just because your life is not exactly shaped according to your wishes.'

She shook her head mutely.

'When will you see Fanny?'

'Not to-day, please.'

‘You must dine with us to-morrow.’

Annis looked beseeching.

‘Indeed you had better come every day, and let Fanny take tea with you here. Solitary meals are bad for nervous people.’

‘I can’t go among the poor this week, Mrs. Wayatt.’

‘I dare say you are not equal to that, or to seeing many people. I shall tell friends that you have been overdone and upset. Your unfortunate adventure may bear some of the blame, no doubt. Let me see—what day do you go home? Wednesday in next week? Better take things quietly till then.’

Whether or no Mrs. Wayatt had any inkling as to the truth, she did not show it; and, thanks to her kind management, the next few days passed placidly. Annis went to church on Sunday, but really looked pale enough to justify in some measure her denial of herself to visitors, and inquiries at the door after her health were rather frequent next day.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THINGS BEING FLAT.

AFTER all, Annis did not return home on the Wednesday. There came an opportune invitation to the house of an old friend living not far from Collins Mead, and Annis accepted it at once. She was glad to be absent from London through the family discussions following upon the arrival of Mrs. Dermot and Con, and also through Mr. Fenton's visit. He could not spare more than a week from his parish just then, and, the week over, Annis herself went back.

Some friends had been asked to late dinner before it was known that Mr. Fenton must leave, and that Annis would return on that particular day. Mr. Dermot being occupied, Haye Digby met her at the station, trim and cool as usual. Annis would rather have been spared his company. He sauntered after her luggage, secured a cab in leisurely style, and as they drove away remarked :

'You did not know I was at home?'

'No,' said Annis.

'I would not have come, if I had guessed what was going on. Two lovers in a house are a bore. Everything upside down.'

Annis leant back, and said, 'I suppose everyone is pleased.'

'Enraptured. Nothing but kisses and congratulations. Nina is a nine days' queen, of course.'

'Mr. Fenton has gone, I believe?'

'To-day. You have just missed seeing him. A rather superior specimen of the country parson—no manner of sleepiness about him. Middle-aged, and insanely in love, as middle-aged men usually are when they tumble in. I don't mean insanely as to the object, but as to the subject.'

'That is not his way,' escaped Annis.

'I forgot that you were acquainted. Of course—he comes from your old home. He is not otherwise than pleasant—a well-meaning individual.'

Annis felt fretted.

'The bride-elect looks blooming,—almost as handsome as Ethel.'

'Some think her more handsome.'

'The two are not to be compared commonly. She shows her best just now.'

On reaching the house, there seemed nobody at hand to offer a welcome.

Annis looked into the dining-room, where on the table fruit and flowers figured prettily among the plate and glass ; but of people there were none. She went upstairs then to her own room.

‘Dinner is at half-past seven, Miss Dermot. It is six now, and the young ladies are dressing,’ said the maid, after unfastening her box.

‘I must dress too,’ Annis remarked listlessly.

‘Missis desired to be told when you came, Miss, but she is engaged at this moment.’

‘No hurry. I shall be glad of a little quiet.’

The girl gone, she took off jacket and hat, and pulled out of a drawer a black grenadine dress trimmed with white. So much of preparation accomplished, she sat down on the bed, leant her head against the foot-board, and fell into musings, from which a tap awakened her.

‘Annis ! Oh, you are here.’

Nina came softly in, cheeks flushed, eyes bright, and white dress falling gracefully with some touches of pink about it.

‘I am ready early,’ she said. ‘May I stay for a few minutes ? Mamma is coming soon, I believe ; but she is rather late.’



Annis made a sign of assent to the question, and Nina took a seat beside her.

‘I wanted to tell you—Annis, I am so happy.’

Annis’ damp fingers lay limply in her sister’s grasp, for a hard fight was going on below. At that moment the feeling in her heart towards Nina was almost a feeling of hatred.

Nina dropped the fingers, and instinctively moved two inches farther away.

‘I don’t know whether you care, after all, but I did fancy you would be glad for me.’

‘I hope—it—I hope all will be for the best,’ faltered Annis.

Nina sat gazing at her.

‘Is anything the matter? You look quite pale, and your hand is cold.’

‘I have not been quite well—I am tired to-night—and chilly. It does not matter.’

‘I think it does. I should like—I should like everyone to feel as I do,’ said Nina, a low laugh breaking from her. ‘It is just like a wonderful dream. I can hardly believe it, even now. Everything looks so bright. I seem hardly to have known before what happiness means. O Annis, I do so want to thank you, because if you had not asked me to Collins Mead, I might never never have known

—Giles.' The word came with a little pause and blush. 'I don't see how I ever could. I do thank you, dear dear Annis.'

Did not Annis know as much—ah, how plainly?

'So you will believe that I really feel very very grateful,' continued Nina, laying once more her hand on her sister's arm, which seemed to shrink and contract beneath her touch. 'I shall never forget all that I owe to your kindness.'

Annis' other hand clutched the bed-post firmly. The fight was going on still, but she managed to murmur some response, which Nina took for deprecation.

'Indeed I shall not. But there is something else that I want to say. You don't mind, do you? I can't help feeling that I owe you a debt in another way too—and perhaps you don't know it. Giles is so good, Annis—oh, such a real true servant of God. You have seen that in him, haven't you? He seems to me so to live for God. And if I were still what I used to be, I don't see how he could have thought about me. For when you came to London, I was so ignorant and hardly understood anything about religion, though I did really want to be good. Giles has helped me on lately more than anybody, but still I did learn a great deal

from you. I used to listen when you were talking to Isabel, and once or twice Con told me of things you had said to her—and I liked them, though she didn't. I thought you might be pleased to hear, Annis—for you see how much real reason I have to be grateful.'

Annis was wearily conscious that she ought to feel thankful, and did not feel thankful. She only felt that she cared little about the matter.

'I thought it was one of the happiest things that could come to anyone who really loves God—helping somebody else to love Him, I mean,' said Nina, in a half-pained and puzzled manner. 'I thought it was what you wanted most of all in the world to be able to do.'

'I do want it, and you must not think I don't feel glad,' said Annis, with filling eyes. 'I am only stupid and dull to-night; and I don't think I really did much for you, after all. If I had talked and tried to use my influence over you, it would have been different.'

'I don't think a great deal of talking to me would have been what I should have liked,' said Nina slowly. 'Sometimes, perhaps,—but it is getting late. Had you not better dress?'

She gave help dexterously, without seeming to

do much. Annis, usually a fidget and disposed to dawdle, made short work of her toilette this particular evening, and soon stood arrayed.

‘Ten minutes still before we need go down,’ said Nina. ‘There is one thing which I want very much to speak to you about. Giles says I had better. He says you are the very best person to consult.’

Annis twisted her jet bracelet round her wrist with nervous haste, and said not a word.

‘It is about Ethel—if you are not too tired to hear what I have to say. You don’t mind? But I must make you promise first not to tell anyone more than I give you leave to tell.’

‘If it is right,’ said Annis.

‘I don’t suppose you will think it wrong. Ethel is not happy, and I don’t know what to do.’

‘Why not happy?’

‘Things are not so nice as Aunt Marson expected, when she wished Ethel to go there. We thought the Comte and Comtesse were particular friends of hers, but we found them to be mere acquaintances. She does not often see them. Ethel never would let me tell Aunt Marson, but she let me know once or twice that things were not nice.’

‘What things?’

‘I could not get her to tell me a great deal. I know she did not like the kind of society kept there. The eldest son is a gambling idle fellow, very much at home, and I *think* he admires Ethel and makes things uncomfortable for her. The old Comtesse is proud, and treats her quite *de haut en bas*, and the Comte is ill-tempered and disagreeable, though he often pays her compliments. It isn’t a nice house for Ethel to be in. I should have told long ago, but she made me promise not to let Papa or Mamma or Con know anything without her leave.’

‘She ought not to stay in such a place,’ said Annis.

‘So I say ; but she is so very anxious to save enough for Con to go to Wildbad again next year.’

‘She need not,’ murmured Annis. ‘I will see to that.’

Nina looked doubtingly at her, wondering whether she might take the words in their full possible meaning.

‘Ethel ought to give up at once and come home. Papa would not like her to be there.’

‘No, so I told her ; but she laughed and said, “I am not a chicken. I know what I am about,

Nina." But, indeed, I don't like it for her, and I know she found things unpleasant. She grew quite pale and thin before I left, and seemed to have so little of her old spirit. And she has written very seldom of late, and only little short dry letters, with nothing in them. If Mamma had not been away, and had not had her head so full of Con, she must have felt anxious—I know she must. I had a note from Ethel yesterday, and I have shown it to nobody. It is so short and confused, and at the end she says, "I have not been well for a long time, and sometimes I feel as if I *must* come home, but I am determined to wait a little longer. Not a word of this to anybody." But I don't think I should be quite right to go on hiding it all, do you, Annis? The rest of the letter is about almost nothing, and it has blots and mistakes all through,—so unlike Ethel. I can't understand it. What ought I to do?

'Tell Papa at once,' said Annis.

'I promised her that I would not, so I can't. I did not promise her to tell nobody.'

'Then write and say to her that you and I have talked things over, and that I feel bound to tell. I only promised not to do so if it were right, and this would not be right.'

Nina looked perplexed.

‘I am glad you feel so sure,’ she said. ‘I could not in your place—but then I always find it difficult to decide. Ethel doesn’t generally like being managed. I wonder how she will like this.’

‘She will not let any foolish pride stand in the way, surely. I can afford well to send Con again to Wildbad. There will be no school-building on my hands next year.’

‘O Annis, how good of you! That will make a difference indeed! What a dear kind sister you are to us! Then we need only tell Papa that Ethel is not very comfortable, and that you are making it needless for her to stay any longer. Ethel will come directly, I am sure, when she hears what you say, and Mamma will be so happy to have her again.’

‘Always that,’ thought Annis drearily. ‘My money is of value, but it is not myself that people are delighted to have. I am nothing even to Mamma in comparison with her other children.’

But how much of this was not Annis’ own fault?

‘Aunt Marson ought to have interfered long ago,’ she said, trying not to speak stiffly.

‘Aunt Marson went to Italy directly I left her,

and has been there ever since. Besides, Ethel never let her know anything about the Comte and his family. How lonely Ethel must have felt since we both left—not that she saw us often, but she always knew we were not many miles distant.’

With a rap at the door Mirrie whisked in, a picture of plump health, in thick white dress and cerise ribbons.

‘Oh, here you are!’ she cried. ‘How do you do, Annis? Quite well? Why, you look all pinched and pasty, like Con when she has had a fret. I wish I were you, going down to dinner. Well, it is a comfort that I shall be old enough next year. Fancy Nina having you all to herself in this style—but the darling deserves it. Oh, what a shame that Giles isn’t here to-night! He says I am to call him Giles, not Mr. Fenton. Funny, so old as he is; but we all like him very much—if only he didn’t mean to take Nina away!’ Did Nina tell you about the wedding? No! If I had been you, I would have found out everything directly. We have been in such a bustle that nobody has written you word of anything. It didn’t seem worth while when you were to be back so soon. Come, we may as well go downstairs, or you will both be late. Mr. Fenton wants it to take place in six weeks.’



‘So soon!’ escaped Annis.

‘He thinks six weeks an enormous time, I expect. The only thing is about Ethel.’

‘She will come now,’ Nina said softly, with a glowing glance at Annis.

‘Oh, have you heard from her?’ asked Mirrie, misunderstanding. ‘Then I suppose it will be as he wishes. What colour do you advise for us bridesmaids, Annis? I should like green and white, but Mamma likes the idea of pink. I don’t fancy you could wear pink. It ought to be blue.’

‘I?’ said Annis; ‘I shall not be a bridesmaid?’

‘Why, of course you will. You and Ethel and Con and I—and most likely Isabel Futvoye, too; for one never can be certain that Con won’t fail us, and take to the sofa at the last moment, even though she is so much better: and three bridesmaids would look what our old dressmaker calls “rather mean.”’

Annis thought only of the first words.

‘I can’t—I am too old,’ she said; whereupon Mirrie went into ringing fits of laughter, leaning over the balusters.

Mrs. Dermot came out of the drawing-room, lady-like in her mauve silk.

‘My dear Mirrie, you will rouse the neigh-

bourhood. I should not like my guests to arrive in the middle of that outburst. Annis—I did not see you. Quite well, dear?’

Mother and daughter exchanged a quiet kiss, each seeming preoccupied.

‘Have you seen Con yet? You will think her wonderfully improved. I should have found you out before, but I have been rather worried. Mr. and Mrs. Paisley have sent an excuse at the last moment, on account of the illness of their son. They are called away by telegram. And this afternoon Mr. Fenton looked in to say that Mrs. Belt has gone to bed with a bad throat.’

‘Why, almost nobody is coming,’ exclaimed Mirrie. ‘No ladies.’

‘Mr. Belt, Mr. Fenton, and Mr. Futvoye. Rather a failure,’ said Mrs. Dermot, with a serenity over the fact which all hostesses would not find it easy to display. ‘We must transform the dinner-party into a family dinner. Mirrie, I shall have to admit you—if you will keep your laughter in order.’

‘I’ll be decorum itself,’ said Mirrie, beaming, while Annis repeated :

‘Mr. Fenton! I thought——’

‘Not Nina’s Mr. Fenton—not Giles, I mean,’ said

Mirrie—‘but Giles’ brother, Mr. Willis Fenton. It is odd his being in London now, but he just happens to be staying with his friends, Mr. and Mrs. Belt. Didn’t Nina tell you about him? Why, you can’t have talked about anything at all in your room.’

Nina thought the talking had been to some purpose. She slipped behind the others, linking her arm in Mrs. Dermot’s, and whispering :

‘Mamma, Annis means to pay for Con’s next visit to Wildbad, and she wants Ethel to come home—not only for my wedding, but for good.’

‘Very kind of Annis,’ said Mrs. Dermot, after a moment’s bewildered hesitation, for the proposal came suddenly. ‘We should all be delighted—if Ethel is willing. What made Annis think of it just now?’

‘We were talking together. I told her I knew Ethel was not very comfortable or happy——’

‘Ethel not happy!’

‘She did not like me to say anything, so long as there was a “must” for her staying; but the must is gone now. She isn’t very comfortable there, I know. Don’t you think the sooner we can get her home the better?’

A knock at the front-door sounded.

‘Of course. There must be no delay. You ought

to have told me long ago, Nina, if you had any such idea. But Ethel has always written so cheerfully—and very regularly too till lately. I have not heard for some little time, certainly.'

'She ought to come home. Oh, it is all right now,' said Nina, smiling. 'I am so glad to think you will have *her*, Mamma,'—and though she did not add, 'when I leave,' she plainly meant it.

## CHAPTER XX.

### A MASCULINE BLUNDER.

‘So my brother has fallen a victim at last.’

Dinner was nearly at an end, when Annis found herself thus addressed by her right-hand neighbour, Mr. Willis Fenton—a conversation with her left-hand neighbour having just terminated. Mr. Willis Fenton was several years younger than his brother, and rather impulsive in manner.

‘Why should he not?’ was the only remark which occurred to Annis.

‘Really I don’t know. There has been a family opinion afloat for some years past that Giles was cut out for a bachelor. He never was given to falling in love like some men, and I suppose we all fancied he never would.’

Annis was silent.

‘However, I congratulate him in his choice with all my heart. What a pretty girl your sister is! He will be a happy man.’

‘If prettiness were the only requisite.

‘If prettiness were her only characteristic, you would have me there! But somehow I never expected Giles to have a handsome wife. One fancied him more likely to go in for the plain and old-fashioned style—a middle-aged housekeeper sort of individual, great at flannel vests. How naughty I am to say all this!’ and he broke into a laugh.

‘I thought you did not fancy him likely to marry at all,’ said Annis, with a faint laugh of response.

‘Well, no, it did seem almost hopeless. A year ago, when I met him, he descanted on the virtues of a lady in his parish—I forget her name, but quite a Lady Benevolence—expatiating on her good deeds, till I really believed he had stumbled on the right individual at last. “When are the banns to be given out, Giles?” said I, and he jumped as if he had been shot. “Banns!” said he. “Why, won’t you be marrying her soon?” asked I. “Just the person for your parish!” “Oh, no, no, no, thank you!” said he, very resolutely. “Why not?” quoth I; and after all the praises he had been pouring out he had the face to say, “Too good an opinion of herself, and much too clever a hand at managing.”

I told him he was a wretch to speak so of any lady. "The fact is," I said, "the lady in question has a long purse, and you find her purse convenient in your parish." He wouldn't admit any such motive, of course, but I fancy my shaft struck near the mark. I suppose he and she have remained good friends : for next time I saw him I asked him how his affair with the Lady Benevolence was progressing, and he said, "She is building new schools for my parish children—most generous—and I am not going to have any nonsense in connection with her name." So of course I sat rebuked, and ventured no further remarks about the old lady—for I believe she really is old, quite a mother in fact to parish and parson alike.'

Annis' cheeks burnt, her fingers tingled, and her ears sang. Pride came to her aid, and she said coldly :

'The lady ought to be very much obliged to you both.'

Then with a sense of relief she saw her mother rise, and in the confusion of leaving the room she contrived to escape to her own unobserved.

Nina followed her thither almost immediately, but Annis held the door two inches open.

'I will be down soon,' she said.

‘You are not going to unpack now, Annis?’

‘No; I will be down soon. I want a quiet half-hour.’

Nina vanished, and Annis sat alone, writhing and smarting beneath a sense of bitter indignity. She was deeply wounded, and her feelings towards Giles Fenton underwent so strong a revulsion as to partake at that hour of positive detestation. No words seemed to her strong enough to convey her indignant anger.

Yet she was unfair, and the fact that she was so dawned upon her in some degree even then. He had never given her the slightest reason to suppose that he loved her. He had praised her in a friendly way to his brother, and finding himself misunderstood, had counteracted the mistake by a few strong words touching her weaknesses; and out of all this Willis Fenton had worked up a good tale to amuse his neighbour at dinner.

‘It is no more, after all, than I deserve,’ she said at length; and a wave of despairing indifference, which was *not* indifference, rushed in upon the seething back-flow of conscious humiliation. What did it all matter? Who cared whether she were happy or miserable? As for home, mother and sisters could be content with or without her. They



would be grateful, no doubt, for benefit from her money, but her presence was to them no necessity. She had held herself aloof, had created a separating chasm, had therefore chiefly herself to blame ; but the knowledge that trouble is owing to self does not commonly lessen the pain of that trouble. As for Collins Mead, she had lost all interest in it, and the bare idea of life there was utterly distasteful. If Annis could not be queen in the parish, she preferred absence ; and she knew that Nina would be queen. ‘Aut Cæsar, aut nullus.’ As for London, work among the poor had lost its charm. How could she teach others, when she had so failed ? How could she speak to others of serving God, when she had persistently served self ? How could she talk of resignation, when she was not resigned ?

She was not resigned, neither was she humble. A certain inclination to exaggerate her own faults, her own unhappiness, and her own repentance, belonged to a mood of humiliation, but not to a mood of humility. There was little of calm self-condemnation, though she said bitter things of and to herself ; and wounded pride raged angrily, forbidding tears to flow.

‘Oh, if only I had never left Collins Mead !’ she moaned ; and then she remembered that the pre-

sent keenest pain might still have come, though possibly more slowly. 'Oh, if I had never left home—never gone to live with Auntie!' but with this she had nothing to do. The change had been arranged for her. Here or there she had been placed by a Heavenly Father's hand, and here or there the sorrow had come, permitted by His love.

Annis had often told sorrowing ones among the poor that they were wrong to repine, wrong not to accept with a smile what God had willed to send them. Could she take now the stand of happy submission which she had recommended to others?

She left this question unanswered, and went downstairs, outwardly a paler and colder maiden than was her wont, inwardly sore and comfortless at heart.

Having remained longer upstairs than she had intended, Annis found the gentlemen already in the drawing-room. Talking and laughing went on briskly, and she was unperceived till close to the group. Mr. Futvoye was the first to rise and hand her his chair.

'Tired with your journey?' he asked, taking another.

'It is a long way to come,' Annis said.

‘Where from, Miss Dermot?’ inquired Mr. Fenton.

She hardly turned her head in his direction to say, ‘Home;’ and added immediately, ‘How is Isabel, Mr. Futvoye?’

‘Well and busy, and longing for your companionship.’

Willis Fenton evidently felt himself snubbed, and Nina exchanged a puzzled glance with her mother.

‘How has the East End managed to scrape along of late, without Miss Dermot’s superintendence?’ asked Haye Digby.

‘As well without as with it,’ Annis said sharply; and the remark caused a general laugh, while Annis herself felt more like bursting into tears.

‘So-many old ladies inhabiting cellars, *minus* so-many knitted vests! So-many ragged little girls, *minus* so-many clean new bibs! So-many interesting cases among public-house frequenters, *minus* so-many moving feminine addresses! Dreadful to contemplate,’ said Haye.

‘Downright neglect of duty,’ added Percy; while Annis had no spirit to answer. ‘I should recommend a double amount of good works in the next six weeks, to make up for lost time.’

Mr. Futvoye's pleasant eyes travelled gravely from the one speaker to the other.

'Are you laughing at good works, Percy?' he asked.

Percy seemed checked by the courteous and kind manner of the questioner.

'Only at some people's,' he said.

'Whose, may I ask?'

'There is a distinction, of course,' said Percy.

'What distinction?'

Percy laughed, half contemptuously, half uneasily. Haye Digby muttered something under his moustache.

'I beg your pardon!' said Mr. Futvoye.

'I merely remarked that there is such a thing as the talkee-talkee style of good works,' said Captain Digby.

Mr. Futvoye made a movement of half-assent.

'Would you not rather say the talkee-talkee style of professed workers?'

'I can't decide such delicate points. I only know the thing when I see it. It loves to get upon a pedestal and be admired,' pursued the Captain, watching the effect of his words upon more than one present. 'It finds some satisfaction in private applause; it smacks its lips over a platform tribute

to its excellence ; and it delights above all to find itself in a periodical.'

'True—true,' said Mr. Futvoye, with sorrow. 'But what you are describing is not Christianity.'

'I beg your pardon!' Haye said quickly in his turn. 'Busy folks of that class are invariably described by friends of like mind as "most excellent and devoted Christians."'

'I don't venture to question their excellence or devotion. But we must learn what Christianity is at the fountain-head—not after it has trickled through half a dozen muddy fields. Did you ever read certain words of the Lord Jesus Christ: "When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth"? What does it mean?'

'Well, I confess I always am at a loss to reconcile that injunction with the blazoning abroad of people's good deeds by themselves nowadays.'

'Then where you cannot reconcile, remember that the words of Christ, and not the mistakes of His followers, are to be taken as the true rule of Christianity.'

'But isn't it needful sometimes to ask for help, and to make people interested by telling about wants?' asked Nina, blushing.

‘Yes, but not by blowing a trumpet over all that has been done. The less of “I,” the better.’

He looked at Percy again.

‘Is that the distinction you meant? I doubt it, Percy.’

‘Why should you, Mr. Futvoye?’ asked the young man.

‘Because it is not that, but quite another distinction that makes many praise one “good work” so called, and speak lightly of another. There are thousands in the present day who will exalt to the sky any deeds of kindness done, or lives of self-denial spent, simply in the name of *mankind*, while they despise and even hate those deeds of kindness and lives of self-denial done and spent openly in the Name of Jesus. Am I speaking too strongly? Percy—Captain Digby—you *know* that it is truth, whether true of yourselves or no.’

‘I could put up with consistent Christians,’ said Haye Digby, while Percy reddened and was silent.

‘Aye, we can generally put up with pure gold if it is to be had. But we are often obliged to accept gold with a measure of alloy in it too. A perfectly consistent English gentleman is a delightful sight, Captain Digby; but the sight is rare. One has to put up with alloyed gold in that respect also.’

Mrs. Dermot just lifted her face, and said,—  
‘Yes,’—rather expressively.

‘Are you all tired of the subject?’ asked Mr. Futvoye. ‘Before you turn to something else, shall I tell you the true distinction to be drawn between the two classes of so-called good works?’

‘I suppose you would say, those that are of real benefit, and those that are useless,’ observed Mr. Fenton.

‘No. There is one straight line of classification—those that are pleasing to God, and those that are not.’

‘One cannot suppose that any deed of kindness and liberality is displeasing to God,’ said Mr. Fenton.

‘At first sight, no. But look closer. Suppose I resolve to give £10,000 to build a hospital, for the sake of being looked upon as a generous man, and gaining a name for Christian devotion, while I give no thought to God in the matter. Would that be an action pleasing to God? Or suppose that I do not so much care for praise, but do wish to be kind and helpful to the suffering, though still absolutely indifferent to the manner in which God may regard my action. Mr. Dermot, you are a father. Would it delight you to see Mirrie doing a kindness here

or there, while holding coldly and haughtily aloof from you, and scorning to care whether or no she followed your will ?’

Mr. Dermot shook his head.

‘I have put an extreme case. But the same temptation follows God’s own children in their works.’

‘Still a deed of kindness *is* a deed of kindness,’ said Captain Digby.

‘I do not underrate it as such. I only maintain that “good works” in the Bible sense mean more. You and I can only see the deed, but God reads the motive. I suspect there is many a deed of kindness done to us, which you and I should little value if we could read the true motive. Happily, we often cannot do so. There will come a testing-time, when the wood and hay of good works done unto self will be burnt up, and only the true metal will stand. Even a cup of cold water, given in the Name of Christ, shall not miss its reward ; but I don’t read of any heavenly reward for a million pounds given with no thought of Him.’

Mr. Futvoye rose and went towards the table.

‘Come, I have talked enough. I shall have you all making remarks on the garrulous inclinations of old men. Pardon my little sermon. Annis, is this album yours ?’



Annis moved to his side, and there was a general break-up of the group, Nina going to the piano. After a minute or two, Annis said softly :

‘Are there not often mixed motives?’

‘For what?’ Mr. Futvoye asked.

‘Good works.’

‘Have you ever found a motive in yourself perfectly simple in its nature?’

The question was rather too deep for Annis, never great at self-analysing. She gave him a puzzled look, and he changed his form of expression :

‘Have you ever noticed how evil and good motives struggle together in the heart?’

‘Yes, I—I am beginning to find out.’

‘Only beginning?’

She drew another album nearer, and almost instinctively opened upon a photograph of the new Collins Mead Schools.

‘In building these——’ she said ; ‘Mr. Futvoye, is it all lost labour? I did not only wish God’s glory. I am afraid—I am sometimes afraid—I cared very little about that.’

‘I am glad you know so much,’ he said gently. ‘A little applause was tempting, Annis.’

‘Yes—O yes. I did not see it before as I do now. Was it all thrown away?’

‘The building of the school-house? Nay, I trust that may prove useful for many a long year. You can ask for it in prayer. If you built to receive praise from man, you have probably already “*had* your reward.” If you built with love and self-denial for Christ’s sake, then another kind of reward awaits you by-and-by.’

‘I would rather that should be mine,’ murmured Annis, and she found it difficult to keep back her tears. Then Mirrie came briskly up.

‘Oh, is that the picture of your schools? Look, Mr. Fenton——’

Annis would have shut the book, but she was too late. Mirrie drew it away quick as thought.

‘Look, Mr. Fenton—these are the schools at Collins Mead. Annis built them, you know——’ And if he had not known to whom the name belonged, her glance at Annis, and the deep blush of the elder sister, left no possibility of a mistake. ‘Isn’t it pretty and tasteful—aren’t they, I mean?’

Willis Fenton received the album slowly, and gazed fixedly at the photograph, growing hotter each moment with dire embarrassment. ‘If I had but cut out my tongue before I ventured on such gossip!’ he thought, while Mirrie gazed at him with amazement.

‘Why, Mr. Fenton, you seem to think it the ugliest picture you ever saw in your life. I never saw anybody disgusted with the style of Annis’ schools before.’

‘I—a—I—ahem—you entirely mistake my feelings,’ faltered the young man ; and then, with an effort, he turned to the light and examined the picture. ‘Very—a—highly artistic.’

Annis moved away, and heard no more. Another beside herself found the rest of the evening long, and was glad when it was over.

‘One word, Miss Dermot,’ an imploring voice said from among the coats and hats hanging up in the hall, as Annis passed along, believing the three guests to have departed. Willis Fenton emerged from a dark corner. ‘One word,’ he said breathlessly. ‘I beg your pardon—I am just ready to go—but I waited a moment in hopes of seeing you or your sister.’

‘Nina? I will call her,’ said Annis coldly.

‘No, no—I beg of you—a word to yourself is better. I have made an egregious blunder, and I beg a thousand pardons. I—I—I beg your pardon, Miss Dermot—sincerely. I hadn’t the least idea—and I assure you I made more of the tale than I had any right. Do pray believe me, and exonerate

Giles of rudeness. I assure you there is no one but me to be blamed.'

'It is not worth mentioning,' said Annis. 'Good-night.'

'But you won't think about it again? If you would only believe me. It was *really* only my nonsense. Giles didn't say half that I told you—at least not in those words, and the form of expression is everything, you know. I'll blame myself any amount for my own horrible exaggeration. Do pray forgive me. How can I possibly say more? I couldn't guess it was yourself—how could I?—but indeed more than half of it is nonsense.'

'You really need not trouble yourself to make any more excuses,' said Annis, turning her face full upon him in the gas-light, and even smiling. 'It is a most unimportant affair. What difference could your brother's opinion of me possibly make?'

Willis Fenton bowed and departed, silenced if not pleased. Annis gave one more smile of congratulation to self at having managed so well. Then she sighed, went to her own room, bolted the door, and throwing herself down on the bed, cried bitterly.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A HINT TO ANNIS.

‘I REALLY do not understand Annis just now,’ remarked Con, rising from the dining-room sofa, where she had been indulging in an afternoon siesta. With a slight shake of her tumbled skirt, she came to the table, gaping by the way. Mr. Dermot sat writing letters at one end, and Nina plied her needle at the other. Wildbad seemed to have worked wonders for Con. The weakness of spine was greatly lessened, nervous excitement had proportionately decreased, and she rarely spent more than two hours at a time upon the couch.

‘Why, Con, I thought you were asleep.’

‘I was thinking. What has come over Annis of late? She looks dismally doleful.’

‘I know what makes me dismally doleful, and that is hearing nothing from Ethel.’

‘You doleful! You are the happiest creature alive, singing half the day.’

Nina blushed. 'I suppose I can't help singing sometimes. But, indeed, I do think we ought to have heard before this. Papa, I can't think why Ethel does not write.'

'I can't think either,' responded Mr. Dermot.

'No fear but that she will be home in time for the wedding,' remarked Con. 'It is a good thing you would not agree to the earliest date thought of, Miss Cautious. We are barely out of August yet—full five weeks more.'

'But the seventh of October is only two months from the time she first heard from Annis. What if the Comte should insist on her staying the full quarter?'

'He can't insist. He might refuse the last month's salary, but what of that? Besides, a Frenchman is too polite.'

'I don't know about the politeness. I wish it were put off till November.'

'A good thing poor Giles is not here. And of all dismal months to be married in——'

'Ethel certainly ought to have written,' Mr. Dermot broke in.

'She might,' Con said. 'It is full three weeks, and more, since Annis and Nina first wrote to her about coming home, and long letters from you and

Mamma went almost directly after. She is in debt to us all. I thought we should have had a reply by return of post.'

'Annis deserves it,' said Nina. 'She deserves thanks. But Ethel is not lazy. It is never Ethel's way to be lazy. I am only afraid she is not well.'

'Oh, pooh—you young ladies are always too busy to write now-a-days,' said Mr. Dermot hastily, getting up. 'No need to worry ourselves. We shall soon hear.'

Yet they knew that nobody in the house was more worried by Ethel's singular silence than Mr. Dermot. Mrs. Dermot was of a temperament to bear suspense easily, and to expect no ill. He left the room, and Con asked abruptly :

'What has been the matter with Annis lately?'

Nina had not noticed that anything was the matter. Some slight dulness of perception was excusable in her at that date. She looked perplexed.

'Surely you see it. She seems to care for nothing. I never saw a girl so oddly changed. She just drags through a little housekeeping, but if Mamma and I did not keep a look-out half would be left undone; and as for East End work, if one is

to judge from her manner, she finds it the veriest bore.'

'She has not looked very lively, to be sure,' said Nina slowly, with a pause for recollection. 'I am afraid I have not thought much about her. I seem to have been so busy.'

'My dear, nobody expects you to think much about anybody just now.' Con stood silent, drumming her fingers lightly on the table. 'Nina,' she said, 'how did you and Annis get on together at Collins Mead?'

'That is an old story.'

'Not to me. You had done telling it by the time I came home. Was she pleasant?'

'Yes——' and Nina stopped. 'Yes,' she said, and stopped again.

'But——'

'There isn't any "but."'

'I heard it in your voice.'

'I did not mean to say it.'

'What did she feel—how did she take it—about you and Giles?'

'She never said much. I suppose it isn't her way.'

'Never was anybody's way to say more, when she has things to her mind.'



‘Why shouldn’t this be to her mind?’ asked Nina.

‘Perhaps—well—she might have been surprised,’ said Con discreetly—‘as we were. Somehow, it was about the last thing I ever expected.’

‘You see, you did not know Giles,’ replied Nina, smiling; and Con dropped the subject without further allusion to what she *had* expected.

But Con found her mother quicker of apprehension. Fewer words and slighter hints were needed to bring out a pitying sigh.

‘Yes—poor Annis—I am very sorry for her. Don’t let her know that you understand.’

‘She looks very unhappy,’ said Con.

‘I am afraid it has been a strong attachment on her side. Sometimes I could wish Nina had never gone to Collins Mead—but the child is so happy; and he might never have cared for Annis.’

‘Curious how we made up our minds that Annis was to be Mrs. Fenton—you and Ethel and I. Nina never heard us speak about it.’

‘No. I don’t suppose Annis was aware of her own feelings until he spoke.’

‘Well, I wish one could do anything to brighten her up, or distract her thoughts,’ said Con.

If 'distraction' were the thing needed, it lay nearer ahead than Con supposed.

Ethel's silence became a matter for daily increasing anxiety. Mr. Dermot wrote again, and the rest followed suit, one after another despatching urgent appeals. The wedding-day lay only three weeks off, and Nina talked seriously of having it deferred, while Mr. Dermot talked as seriously of a trip to the south of France, when there came a short note from Ethel.

'DEAREST MAMMA,

'I am afraid from your letters that my last has not reached you. Nina threatens to put off her wedding, but don't do so on any account. I have had some difficulty as to getting off; but all is arranged, and I hope to be with you three or four days before the 7th. I will write again, and when I see you I can explain all delays.

'Your affectionate child,

'ETHEL.'

This having been read aloud at breakfast-time, there was a blank pause, with exchange of troubled looks.

'What has come over Ethel?' Con exclaimed; and Mrs. Dermot, with moist eyes, said softly :

‘She must have been ill.’

‘Mamma, she doesn’t seem half to care whether she comes or not,’ said Mirrie.

‘She has certainly been ill,’ remarked Annis, looking over the sheet handed to her.

‘It is feeble writing,’ said Mr. Dermot, in his turn. ‘Unlike Ethel. No date, I see—and three or four blunders corrected. That is not Ethel’s usual fashion. “Had some difficulty in getting off!” She is not off, yet. I never knew Ethel express herself so badly.’

‘It is written in a hurry,’ said Mirrie. ‘People often make mistakes when they are in a hurry. And you see she wrote before, and the letter did not reach us.’

‘I only know Ethel never did things in such an odd style,’ Con remarked, with dissatisfaction. ‘France seems to have changed her. I hope Germany has not changed me. Well, we must have her dress prepared. There will be time for alteration, if it does not fit her. She will arrive, you see, three or four days beforehand.’

‘She “hopes to,”’ said Mirrie.

‘It is all settled. She means to do so. It is all right now.’

But Con had more fully to learn the lesson that — ‘*Homme propose, Dieu dispose.*’

‘I hope all is right,’ Mr. Dermot observed later, when alone with his wife. ‘If I were a rich man, I would start at once for the south of France and bring her home. Not being rich, I can’t take such a step without absolute necessity.’

‘There does not seem a necessity. I am a little anxious, I confess,’ Mrs. Dermot said quietly. ‘But I do not think we really need be so.’

‘No—I dare say we shall find it all right, and Ethel laughing at us for making so much of a rather scrawled note. Well, well, it doesn’t do to worry ourselves,’ added Mr. Dermot, sighing. ‘One cannot venture on extra expenses this quarter. The trousseau and wedding will be a severe pull. What makes Annis refuse to be bridesmaid?’

‘She evidently disliked the idea, so I advised Nina to give way.’

‘I should have liked to see the four girls together, all dressed alike. But Annis is apt to take curious fancies, and one can’t force it on her. You and she must settle, of course.’ And Mr. Dermot suspected nothing as to the cause. He went towards the

door, turning back to say, 'Why don't you ask her friend to the wedding?'

'Isabel? She is to be bridesmaid. I thought you knew.'

'No, no, not Isabel. That nice girl at Collins Mead—plump, with light hair. Annis has looked so dull ever since her return, I think she must be pining after her.'

'Fanny Wayatt. I dare say Annis will be pleased,' responded Mrs. Dermot, marvelling over masculine obtuseness. 'I will ask her if she likes the idea.'

Mrs. Dermot did so, having gone into Annis' bedroom for the purpose, and found its occupant seated idly by the open window. She received in answer a listless—'As you please, Mamma.'

'Your Papa thought you would enjoy having her.'

'I really do not mind. Just as you and he think best,' said Annis droopingly.

Nobody else was present. Mrs. Dermot stood looking down on the bent head of her eldest child, —looking calmly, yet with true motherly solicitude.

'How does the East-End work go on, Annis?'

'It goes on—the same as usual.'

‘Did you enjoy very much returning to it after your long break?’

‘One does not always enjoy things equally.’

‘No. I have not heard you speak about your poor of late.’

‘No good to speak; no one here has any sympathy in the matter,’ said Annis sharply.

‘Do you think not?’

‘It is not shown, at all events.’

After a moment’s silence, Annis became aware that she had not spoken pleasantly. She added, in a different tone:

‘I shall take to the work again by-and-by, when all this disagreeable bustle is over.’

‘Most girls like the stir of a wedding.’

‘I don’t,’ Annis said.

‘No, it seems to me that you care little for anything just now. Have you quite lost all interest in life?’

Annis did not answer, but her face worked as if tears lay near at hand. Mrs. Dermot laid a hand upon her shoulder.

‘Are you feeling ill or poorly? Is anything worrying you?’

‘Nothing of the least consequence. I am quite well, only tired.’

‘There must be a cause for the difference in you. I am not the only one asking these questions,’ said Mrs. Dermot, in a lower tone. ‘I do not wish to force confidence, even if I could. But it is easy to see that you are unhappy. Other people see it beside me, and causes will be supposed. There are times, Annis, when womanly dignity makes it needful to hide what one feels.’

Annis started to her feet, a rush of blood crimsoning her face and making even her hands burn.

‘Mamma!’ she said, ‘Mamma, what do you mean?’ and her eyes met Mrs. Dermot’s in a gaze of terrified entreaty. ‘You don’t mean—people don’t think——’

‘No one has quicker sight than a mother,’ said Mrs. Dermot. ‘I only want you to be cautious.’

‘But I don’t know—what—what do you mean, Mamma?’

‘Are you sure you do not understand me? I see a marked change in you—listlessness and depression—ever since——’

To finish the sentence was needless. For three seconds Annis stood with bent head, wringing her fingers together in a fresh humiliation. But then there came an arm softly round her, and all at once Annis was sobbing bitterly, with her face down

upon her mother's shoulder, and a sense of indescribable relief mingling with the pain ; for she no longer felt herself absolutely alone in her sorrow.

'Mamma! Mamma!' she gasped repeatedly ; and her first coherent remark was, 'Somebody will come in.'

Mrs. Dermot went and fastened the door.

'Now we are safe,' she said. 'Never mind ; a good cry will not hurt you ;' and with kind touches and words she rather encouraged the flow of tears. Presently, however, she said, 'But it must be conquered.'

'I don't know—oh, I don't know. I am very very miserable. I wish life were over. Nothing seems worth doing. If only life were over!' Then she looked up, frightened. 'I did not mean to speak so to you. I meant—I meant nobody to know.'

'I know already. You may keep other people from knowing, if you are wise and brave.'

'Mamma, I have not told you anything.'

'I have observed. But, indeed, my dear, if you give way to depression as you have done lately, you will tell your secret to all the world.'

Annis moaned, with face hidden.

'I do not say you are not to speak to me. I



think you would be happier if you would resolve to be a little more open with me. Still I must tell you frankly that it has to be conquered. It *must* be put down.'

No answer came. She went on after a pause—

'You are not the first who has had such feelings to fight. Thousands have suffered just the same. But no true woman will let the world read her secret; and it seems to me that no true Christian will lose all interest in life because God has denied one wish.'

'No—oh, I know I am wrong,' said Annis mournfully. 'But—one wish! Mamma! it is everything.'

'It is *not* everything,' said Mrs. Dermot gravely and with emphasis. 'Have you no one else to love you? nothing else to live for? no work for God to do? Feeling flat and dull is no excuse for looking wretched. Wake up, Annis, and don't let yourself sink so low. You cannot spend your life like this. The thing has to be conquered, and it must be conquered. The pain will not last. It must be fought with and stamped down, and by-and-by it will lessen. But meantime are you going to proclaim your feelings to all your friends?'

'I thought—Mamma, if I were not so weak——'

‘That from *you*, Annis?—you who have so much to say to others about strength given by God to make us bear up under trouble.’

Annis blushed again, and murmured :

‘I thought people would only think me tired and dull.’

‘You must give people credit for quicker observation. What if Nina were to guess the truth—or Mr. Fenton?’

That brought Annis out of her drooping posture.

‘Oh, never!’ she gasped.

‘It should be “never” indeed. But you must take care.’

‘Has anyone, Mamma—anyone guessed except you?’

‘Several are noticing and wondering over the change in you. I do not know that anyone has begun to put two and two together except Con, and you may do much towards making her forget it soon.’

‘Thank you,’ said Annis, in a low voice, with nervous twitchings of face and fingers. ‘Thank you. I am glad you have spoken to me. You won’t tell anybody that you have.’

‘No, not even your Papa.’

Annis whispered once more 'Thank you,' gave her mother a shame-faced kiss, and fled. But in three seconds she came back, meeting Mrs. Dermot outside the door.

'I don't know what I went for,' she said, 'I am going to stay here.'

'The less of solitude the better for you at present,' said Mrs. Dermot.

'Yes—no—I think——'

The answer was not what she expected.

'Yes, I understand. But too long a time allowed for prayer just now would only be time for brooding.'

'I will not be long. I will take care,' murmured Annis. 'And, Mamma, please tell Nina I will be bridesmaid, if she likes.'

'That is wise,' said Mrs. Dermot, evidently pleased. 'But, my dear, your dress is ordered.'

'A silk of that colour is always useful. I will do as you and Nina wish. Con or Ethel might be unwell and fail us.'

'True ; I think you are right,' said Mrs. Dermot.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### WHY ETHEL DID NOT WRITE.

ON the afternoon of the fifth of October, two days before the wedding, arrived Fanny Wayatt. She had not been ten minutes in the house before she perceived that something was wrong. Everyone was busy, and almost everyone wore more or less of an anxious and flurried expression. Even the bride's eyes showed traces of tears, and Mr. Dermot was excited, and Mrs. Dermot was sad.

'Nina looks very sweet. I don't wonder you all feel so much losing her,' Fanny said sympathisingly, when Annis had led her upstairs.

Whereupon Annis, with a nervous change of colour, exclaimed:

'Losing!' and then added, 'Oh, of course—you mean Nina.'

'Yes; I thought I said her name.'

Annis fell into a profound silence while Fanny unpacked.

‘I am sorry for poor Mrs. Dermot,’ the latter remarked presently. ‘Mothers are always to be pitied at weddings, and she looks so sorrowful.’

‘Yes. Oh, it is not only that. Ethel has not come.’

‘Not come ! I saw she was not downstairs, but supposed her to be out. Why, you wrote me word that she was expected—when was it ?’

‘She did not seem able to let us know exactly the day. She has written so little lately. We are very much afraid she has fallen into poor health.’

‘But why ? Is she ill ?’

‘I don’t know. She tells us nothing. It is very strange,’ said Annis uneasily. ‘Some weeks ago there came a short letter, saying she hoped to be here three or four days before the wedding, and about a fortnight ago there was another note mentioning yesterday as the day on which she meant to come, but entreating that if anything hindered her, the wedding might not be put off. She seemed to think it doubtful whether she should manage to be here in time ; but no reason is given. We are afraid the Comte and Comtesse have not treated her nicely.’

Fanny looked perplexed.

‘But why hide it ?’ she asked. ‘Would not Ethel tell at once if she were not happy ?’

‘I don’t know. It is not her way to complain. Nina says she never has been comfortable there, and yet she never let us know. Ethel has her own way of doing things—a curious way sometimes. But we are all very worried.’

‘The Count and Countess could not insist on keeping her, could they?’ said Fanny.

‘I suppose they have a right to a quarter’s notice, unless Ethel forfeits part of her due, and I should not think she would hesitate about that. But if she is poorly and overdone, how could they wish to keep her—even putting aside the wedding? It is easy to see she is that, from her writing. We can’t understand,’ said Annis, with distressed brows. ‘It is odd altogether. I cannot make out the way Ethel has gone on the last few weeks.’

‘Has she written again to say she cannot be here?’ asked Fanny, after a cogitative pause.

‘Not a word, only she does not come. We were looking out for her all yesterday—Mamma turning pale and Mirrie rushing to the window every time a carriage drove past. Papa went to meet almost every train by which she could possibly have arrived, allowing for any manner of delays or hindrances. And he wrote to the Count ten days ago, asking whether Ethel had been ill, and we

have had no answer. I am afraid Mamma is terribly anxious. She takes things quietly, but I don't think any of us are quite to her what Ethel is.'

Fanny noticed with pleasure a certain something in the manner of expression which seemed to imply that Annis no longer stood entirely apart from the family. She saw this still more plainly as hours went on. Annis was not now a mere visitor, but had stepped into her rightful position as eldest daughter of the house.

All day long the looking out for Ethel's arrival continued, and though she came not, no one would give up hope.

'The wedding wouldn't seem like a wedding with Ethel away,' Mirrie complained; and Nina, when alone with her sisters, sorrowfully regretted that she had ever consented to its taking place before the end of the three months. There was a general feeling of disappointment, which made it difficult to keep up due liveliness. Happily much remained to be done in the way of preparation, and everyone was fully occupied.

The girls centred their hopes on the following day, and the eagerly-expected morning post did not pass without an intimation from abroad. 'For Annis from Ethel,' was the cry, and Annis opened

the envelope with surprise. She caught a glimpse of a small slip folded inside the larger sheet, having '*Private*' written across it. Quickly, yet not quickly enough, she let the slip fall back into the envelope, as she drew out the sheet, and then, with an attempt at carelessness, she thrust the envelope into her pocket. But her embarrassed look and heightened colour, together with this action, revealed her secret to at least one present.

'What does she say?' many voices asked impatiently, and Annis read aloud :

'MY DEAR ANNIS,

'Please tell Nina, Mamma, and all, how sorry I am not to be at the wedding. It is a great disappointment, but I cannot arrive so soon. The wedding must go on the same. Do not on any account let it be put off. Weddings once put off so often never take place at all, and I could not bear to think it was my doing. Tell Nina, as she loves me, to make no change. The delay is not my fault. I hope to see you in a few days, and to explain all. Fond love to every one of you, and don't let any one be worried. Do make it a happy wedding.

'Your affectionate

'ETHEL.'



A chill silence fell upon the party, broken by Mrs. Dermot's brother, Mr. Frank Randolph, who had arrived the night before :

'Well, of all odd girls—and of all odd ways of doing things——'

'Something is wrong,' said Nina in a smothered voice, and bursting into tears, she ran out of the room.

'Ethel has no business to treat you in such a fashion,' said Mr. Randolph, looking at his sister's pale face.

'We don't know her reasons,' spoke up Haye Digby. 'Ethel is the most sensible and self-forgetting girl that ever lived.'

'Self-forgetting—yes,' murmured Mrs. Dermot.

'I shall go abroad myself,' said Mr. Dermot.

'To-day ?' asked Con eagerly.

'I would start by the first train, if it were not for to-morrow! What can have come over her? I will go to-day, if you will all manage without me.'

'No, no, nonsense—be sane, pray,' said Mr. Randolph. 'Who is to give away Nina if you go? What difference can one day more or less make?'

Mr. Dermot paced round the breakfast table like a caged animal.

'I don't know how to put off. Look at that

writing, and think of Ethel's firm hand. Nina is right. Something is wrong with her. I am as certain of it as if she stood before me here. What is the date of the letter ?'

'It has no date,' Mr. Randolph said, the sheet having passed through his hand. 'A most feminine epistle. And no mention of place. Written from the château I presume.'

'Of course,' said Mr. Dermot. 'Where is the envelope? Annis——' but Annis was gone.

Several having quitted the table, she had taken the opportunity to escape to her own room. There, with shut door, she drew out the envelope, unfolded the scrap within, and read, not very easily, the following words—

'DEAR ANNIS,

'I think I had better tell you I have been ill, but do not let them know it till the wedding is over. I am not much better yet, and writing is the worst thing. I came here nearly a week ago, but cannot travel more yet—address as above—Mme. Dulaine, mother to the bonne at the château—very kind, so don't be anxious. I wish I had one of you. Perhaps after the wedding—if I am not better——

'E.'

The last words were written in an almost illegible scrawl, and power to continue had evidently been lacking. Annis stood looking down at the sheet in utter uncertainty what to do.

The door opened suddenly, and Annis' startled attempt to hide the sheet was too late. Mrs. Dermot came up and said quietly,

'There was more in the envelope, Annis.'

Annis made no attempt at evasion. She simply did not answer. Mrs. Dermot took up the envelope.

'Paris post-mark! From Paris? What does it mean?'

Annis had not known that her mother's placid face could wear such a look of trembling terror.

'Mamma, don't think too much of it,' she said. 'Indeed it is only that Ethel has been ill, and now she has reached Paris she is too weak to come farther.'

'You are sure! That is all. But—ill in what way?'

Annis mutely placed the scrap of scrawled writing before her eyes. There was nothing else to be done.

'Ill and alone,' murmured Mrs. Dermot. 'My poor darling—always thinking of others! What shall we do? Annis, the wedding must be put off.'

'Now! so near! Would it be right?' asked Annis. 'Ethel has set her heart on its going on.'

She laid her hand on her mother's in a grasp, cold but resolute. 'Mamma, you sec—you hear—I am conquering. But we are not going to think of that—and it is not poor weak *I* after all. We must think about Ethel. The wedding can't be put off now. It would be hard upon Nina and Mr. Fenton.' She had not yet begun to call him Giles. 'In twenty-six hours it will be over.'

'Twenty-six hours! What if the illness is acute?—what if it should return?'

'I should not fear that from what she says. But after all we don't know,' added Annis hastily. 'I have thought of a plan. Suppose I start at once for Paris—this very morning—and send word by telegram as soon as I have seen her, whether she can travel home with me, or whether Papa had better come too. I can afford it, so don't think of the expense, and I am accustomed to manage for myself when I travel. Mamma, don't refuse. I should like it of all things,' she continued, warming to the idea. 'Nina will not mind about only three bridesmaids, and you will all feel happier to know that I am on my way.'

After some hesitation Annis' proposal was adopted. Mr. Randolph was disposed to deride the step as alike comical and inconvenient on the

eve of a wedding-day ; but others thought differently, and Nina was not more indifferent to the number of her bridesmaids than Mr. Fenton was thankful for escaped postponement.

‘We will not telegraph to Ethel. It would only startle her,’ Mr. Dermot said, having himself a great horror of telegrams. ‘And you will arrive almost as soon as a letter could arrive.’

So Annis sent no notice of her approach. She sped rapidly by rail and by steamer, taking with her a small amount of luggage, and wasting no unnecessary time by the way. Advance seemed slow to her, for she was eager to reach Paris ; but like everything in this life the journey came to an end at last.

Having driven from the station to the given address, Annis found herself at the door of a rather shabby house in a dull street.

She inquired for ‘Mademoiselle Dermot,’ adding, ‘Je suis sa sœur. Je désire la voir.’

No difficulty was made. The servant talked fast, much too fast for Annis’ powers of comprehension, and led her upstairs to a bedroom on the first floor. Putting her head through the half-open door, she whispered—

‘Mademoiselle dort.’

'Ne dites rien,' said Annis, trying vainly to recall the French for 'disturb.'

She slipped some money into the servant's hand, made a sign to her to settle with the driver, and softly entered.

Ethel was lying on the bed in a white dressing-gown, with her hair unbound, and a shawl over her feet, sleeping soundly as it seemed; but Annis' entrance startled her into consciousness, and she sat up.

So great was the change from the handsome spirited girl of old, to this wasted hollow-cheeked creature, with large bright alarmed eyes, that Annis positively would not have known her—positively did shrink back a step, as if she had come to the wrong room. But Ethel's face broke into a wan smile, and she fell back, holding out both hands.

'Annis! You frightened me. I could not think who had come.'

'O Ethel, how could you?—why did you never tell us you were so ill?' almost sobbed Annis, leaning over the bed, and dropping warm tears on the cheek of a sister whom she had never perhaps truly loved until that moment.

'Why, Annis!—*you* crying about me!' said Ethel, with languid surprise.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE DIARY AGAIN.

‘ *October 14th, Thursday.*

‘ Rue —, Paris.

‘ It is now a week since I came to Paris, and I am beginning to feel quite at home in these two little rooms on the third storey, and quite *au fait* at managing for myself in a foreign country. How much longer I may have to remain here I do not know.

‘ We sent no notice of my arrival: so I took Ethel by surprise. At first she was excited and pleased, and I really hoped there was nothing much the matter, though she did look terribly white and thin. However, I felt able to send conscientiously a cheerful telegram, which I could not quite have done a few hours later.

‘ Not that there is anything *very* seriously wrong—so the doctor says—only she is exceedingly weak. She cannot walk across the room, cannot eat,

cannot sleep, and is often unable to sit up in bed for five minutes without fainting. How she managed the journey here is a marvel. Will must have taken the place of strength; but it has done her harm, and the doctor—an English doctor whom I have called in—strictly forbids any more travelling at present. Indeed, I almost think it would kill her.

‘When she was able to talk a little, the day I came, I asked her how this state of things had come on, and why she never sent us word.

“I thought it would pass off. I don’t like complaining,” she said. “Besides, there was Con—and Wildbad——”

‘I asked her again how the illness had begun.

“I hardly know,” she said. “I had bad face-ache at first for weeks, and then I began to feel poorly and weak, and there were fits of sickness and faintness, so that I scarcely knew how to get about. There was a good deal to worry me—one way and another. No one seemed to notice anything wrong; so I thought it might be partly fancy; for I had very odd fancies in my head. At lessons I often hardly knew what I was doing?”

“Did you see no doctor?” I asked.

“Yes, I did at last, but he said it was all weak-



ness, and advised more nourishment. I could not follow that prescription, for French cooking does not suit me ; but I thought I might struggle on a few months more. I would have written oftener, indeed, Annis, for I saw Mamma was anxious, but I could not. My head used to swim, and everything used to get into confusion the moment I took up a pen, and I was afraid of writing nonsense, and making you all think I was going out of my mind. It was a silly idea, but it haunted me. I could correct Cecile's exercises, and explain things to her, but I seemed to feel writing letters more than anything."

"You were not fit for writing or teaching either, in that state," I said. "And you were very wrong to hide it from us."

"Was I?" and she gave a little smile—not her old bright smile, but tired and patient. "I thought I was right. People think so differently about right and wrong. It seemed to me my duty to stay there as long as I could ; and I knew Papa could not afford to come and see me—though I did long for a peep at some of you," she added, with eyes full of tears.

'I could not help feeling rebuked. Here was one who made, or had made, no profession to serve

God in heart, disregarding her own ease, careless of discomfort, fighting against bodily weakness, showing a beautiful self-forgetfulness, just from love to her sister. And I, with I believe higher motives, with heavenly help, with a Lord and Master to glorify—how I have failed! If she could do so much, ought not I to have done far more? Yes, and I *should* have done more, if self-love had not been stronger in me than love to Christ. I see it now.

‘Then Ethel explained how my letter to her, offering to undertake Wildbad expenses, and pressing her to return, arrived when she had taken to her bed. Madame la Comtesse was quite willing to part with her, not caring to keep a sick governess on her hands, but to move then was out of the question. The first day Ethel could hold a pen, she scribbled a short note, which seems never to have been posted—indeed, she thinks now that she must have forgotten to address and stamp it. Finding from our letters that we had not heard, she wrote again with great pain and trouble, carefully abstaining from the least word which would be likely to make us put off the wedding. Almost as soon as she could bear to dress, she started to come home. The French *bonne*, the only person in the

household who really looked after her when she was ill, gave her this address, and advised her to rest for two or three nights on her way. Ethel had no choice about the matter, for though she kept up wonderfully through the journey, yet when once she went to bed here she did not lift her head from the pillow for three days. But the charming little old landlady, with her looped-up dress and bright cap-ribbons, was full of pity, and gave her every care ; so Ethel was really better off, even before I came, than at the château.

‘She told me all this, and much besides, ending with,—

“But it is over now, and the wedding has not been put off.”

“Were you not a little bit superstitious about that wedding, Ethel?” I asked.

“No,” she said, “I don’t think I was. Things put off, so often never take place at all. I could not bear to risk Nina’s happiness.”

“I wonder whether you ever think of yourself at all,” I said involuntarily.

“I wish I did not. I used to long, at the château, to be able to forget myself,” she said, with a longing kind of look in her eyes.

‘Something made me put my face close to hers,

with some affectionate words, and then I found her clinging to me, and sobbing—such a worn-out sobbing, like a tired child. I tried to soothe her, begging to know what was wrong, and all she could say was :

“Oh, I don’t know. I am glad it is over—so glad it is over.”

‘I used to think Ethel a mere good-natured shallow unsensitive girl, not half so finely strung or so intense in her feelings as myself. Yes, I will write the words down, though I detest them as I write. But I learnt my mistake that hour. What an utterly foolish thing it is to measure others precisely by ourselves, and to decide that, because they don’t show certain feelings exactly as we show them, therefore they have not such feelings at all !

‘More talking then was not possible, but the next day I tried to find out what she had meant by “worries” at the château. Was not she happy? Were not the Count and Countess kind?

“They did not mean to be unkind,” Ethel said. “They are thoroughly gay and thoughtless, and I dare say they took it for granted that I had all needful comforts. It was not a happy home for an English girl. The society admitted into the house

was not very nice, and things were said and discussed which ought not to have been. I noticed this less at first, when I did not know the language so well. I often wondered at Aunt having recommended me to go there, but she did not know them intimately."

"Was your pupil pleasant?" I asked.

"Affectionate, but giddy and spoilt. She was demoralised by wretched novel-reading—Balzac and his tribe. I felt her to be twenty years older than myself in knowledge of the world's wickedness. I often had to check her in conversation. Then there was her brother. It was not pleasant when he was at home. He used to flatter and try to get up a flirtation; and when I let him know that I would allow no nonsense, he was angry, and took to being disagreeable—as even a polite Frenchman can be."

"Ethel," I said, "did they allow you to keep your Sundays?"

"She blushed faintly. "Yes," she said; "I would not give them up, though Madame made a little struggle at first. The English Church was so far away that I could not walk there more than once, and the last three months not at all, but I used to spend most of the day in my own room."

There was always company on Sunday—and gambling.”

‘I believe I exclaimed at the word.

‘“That went on constantly. I was able to keep out of it all. If not, I would not have stayed, even for Con’s sake. I am afraid I spent most of my Sundays in thinking about home.”

‘I cannot for my part feel that Ethel was right to stay in such a house, but she seems to have had no doubt about the matter. I suppose her mind was so possessed with the idea of earning money for Con that she could not properly weigh other considerations. If it were not so, she would have seen the danger to any young girl of remaining in the château, though, no doubt, the danger was less to Ethel than to many. She is not easily made to swerve.

*‘October 19th, Tuesday.*

‘How different people are in their ways of being ill, as well as in their ways of being active. Here is Ethel, suffering quite as much as Con ever suffered, and far weaker than Con has been, with the most trying kind of nervous debility, yet always grateful, always ready with a smile, almost always cheerful.

‘Characters and temperaments are so different.

Some have nerves more finely strung than others, and really suffer more ; but, on the other hand, some have far greater self-control than others, and the greater self-control quite as often goes with the greater suffering as with the less suffering. Those who have the less self-control are very apt to think that everybody who complains less than themselves must necessarily have less to endure. I have seen a great deal of that with Con, who is fond of saying to everybody who tries to cheer her, "Oh, you don't know what it is ; you never felt anything like it." And yet, how does she know one has not ?

'It is easy to write about Con's faults. I am afraid I have been inclined to something of the same kind myself, though I never used to think so,—not as regards bodily health, but troubles and sensitiveness. Am I really more sensitive than other people—than Ethel ? Her cheerfulness is no proof. That may only show greater self-command and self-forgettingness.

'I remember Fanny once saying to me, in her blunt style, when I suppose I had been letting out a great deal, "Do you really think, Annis, that nobody ever had troubles like you, when you talk of 'unprecedented trials ?'" I thought her very unkind, and was vexed ; but had she not reason ?

*'October 20th, Wednesday.*

'Ethel was able to leave her bed to-day, and to come into the next room, leaning on the servant and me. She was very tottering and weak, but seemed to enjoy lying on the sofa for an hour, and having her tea there. I had just taken her back to bed, and seen her fall half asleep, when I needed something out of the little parlour. And when I went back I found, to my amazement, Haye Digby seated there.

"Why, Captain Digby!" I said.

'He stood up, shook hands, and asked :

"How is Ethel?"

"Getting on slowly," I said. "The complete rest is doing her good; though the doctor will not hear of travelling for another two or three weeks. But what brought you to France?"

"Steam-power—variously exercised," he said drily.

"But your reasons," I said.

"My best answer would be that given by the little girl to the inquisitive gentleman who wished to know her motive for travelling—'I believe it is called a locomotive.'"

'Captain Digby always shuts me up in a way that no one else can do. I sat down and was silent.



“They are all well at home,” he said, after a pause. “The wedding went off quite correctly, with a due admixture of tears and smiles. And the bridesmaids’ dresses—I believe ladies always want to know about them first—were either blue or pink, I am not sure which.”

“They were neither,” I said bluntly, for he puts me out of patience. “You might have used your eyes to better purpose. They were white.”

‘He made an apologetic bow, and said :

“That *was* a mistake—most reprehensible from a feminine point of view.”

“I must go back to Ethel,” I said. “I shall not tell her to-night that you are in Paris. You sleep at the hotel, I suppose?”

‘I stood up, whereupon he dropped his supercilious manner, and quite frankly said :

“Come, no need to go yet.”

“Ethel is alone.”

“See if she wants you, and come back.”

‘I did not see any need to obey Captain Digby; nevertheless, and without knowing why, I did precisely as he told me. Ethel was asleep.

“Sit down, then,” he said. “We must have a little talk. The truth is, your accounts are not deemed satisfactory at home, and everybody is in

a fidget. I had nothing particular to do, and nowhere particular to go, and I decided on a trip to Paris."

"All I beg is, do not make Mamma unnecessarily anxious," I said. "Ethel is getting on, I am sure : only she does not regain strength fast."

"Tell me exactly what has been the matter with her."

'He drew from me, bit by bit, all that I knew. I have been vexed since to remember how much I told him, for there were some things which I am sure Ethel did not intend me to repeat. One would think Captain Digby had been trained as a detective or as an inquisitor. He certainly made me say a great deal more than I meant to say.

*' October 25th, Monday.*

'Captain Digby is still at the hotel, and still constantly in and out. I cannot quite understand him or why he stays. He has curiously dropped his disagreeable manner, since the first few minutes after we met, and is quite pleasant. He forages for little delicacies to tempt Ethel's appetite, in a way that I cannot do, with my ignorance of the place and poor knowledge of French. We had a drive all three together the day before yesterday, and as he

contrived to have Ethel carried downstairs, she escaped over-fatigue. At tea-time he generally drops in for an hour's chat ; and is most amusing, and full of anecdote. Ethel seems to enjoy it.

*' October 29th, Friday.*

' If all goes well, Ethel may be allowed to return home in about ten days. Captain Digby talks of a run to Dijon in the meantime, and of coming back to travel with us. I should certainly be glad to have him to manage things. He is always so well aware what to do. Ethel is better, but still low and feeble—as to health, not as to spirits. I do not think she knows what it is to feel depressed.

*' Evening.*

' And yet I must make a little addendum to that last remark. I noticed Ethel looking very tired after dinner, and she remarked suddenly, in a careless tone :

" I wonder whether Parisian air is always lowering, or whether it is the present state of the atmosphere !"

" Lowering !" I repeated.

" Oh, I only mean that it makes me feel so 'down.' If it were not childish, I could cry half the day ;" and she laughed.

“Why, Ethel,” I said, “*you* feel so!—the most cheerful person I ever knew!”

‘Ethel only replied: “Am I?” But face and manner showed me that I had been misreading her again. How little we really know about others under the outside crust!

*‘October 30th, Saturday.*

‘I think it is a good thing to be thrown sometimes a little more closely with certain friends than one has been, just that one may learn to understand them better. We have seen a great deal of Haye Digby, and I feel that I never understood him before. Now I am almost as well acquainted with him as my sisters are, and we have begun to call one another “Annis” and “Haye.” Ethel one day laughed at us for being so ceremonious with our “Mr.” and “Miss,” when he is just like Papa’s son.

‘Yes, and he is very brotherly with both of us, as indeed he always has been with my sisters. But I am not quite sure that it is all simple brotherliness. Sometimes I have a suspicion. To be sure, Ethel and he are very frank and easy in their manner to one another—but, without being aware of it, I cannot help fancying they are drifting into another kind of feeling.

‘He told us the other day, in a fit of confidence, that the cool half-contemptuous manner which I so dislike, and which he is quite aware of in himself, and dislikes equally, springs from an odd sort of shyness which seizes on him at times. He is too proud to allow it to appear, and cannot control it in any other way. I never should have imagined this.

‘Letters from home are full of wonderment at his staying in Paris all this while, as he came with no such intention.

‘*September 1st, Monday.*

‘Haye is starting this morning for Dijon, but I do not think he will remain long. I am more and more sure that he finds a strong attraction holding him here. He seems very reluctant to go even for a few days.

‘I went to church yesterday morning, and spent the rest of the day with Ethel. Towards evening, when she had grown tired of reading or being read to, and was lying as if asleep, she said suddenly :

“Don’t you think Haye very much improved?”

“Yes, he is,” I said, feeling amused.

“There was always a great deal that was nice in him, but you used not to like him, and you do now, —so I think he must be rather changed.”

““ Perhaps I did not know him so well before,” I said.

““ No ; you used to tease one another. I am afraid it rather amused me to see you putting up each other’s backs. It really was comical. Certain things you did and said provoked him, and when you saw him provoked you condemned him as altogether bad.”

““ Did I ?” I asked doubtfully.

““ Yes. If you spoke on religious subjects, and did it in rather a weak and laughable way—and I do assure you, Annis, very good people are sometimes very weak in their religious talk—he could not smile at you without your taking it for granted that he was an enemy to all religion.”

““ But, Ethel, he was not right,” I said. “There ought to be no fun made of anything sacred.”

““ No—I know,” she said. “I think I know that now, and perhaps Haye knows it better than he used to do. But I assure you it *is* difficult to keep from laughing, when you see anyone professing to be very good, saying and doing things in an affected unreal way. I don’t say it is not wrong to laugh. I think it *is* wrong—if it is unkind, or if it comes near what you call making fun of sacred things. It

must be wrong then. But it isn't easy always to restrain oneself."

'I sat silent, trying not to be vexed, for I thought Ethel was rather hard upon me.

"Haye and I were talking about this yesterday, when he came in and found me alone," said Ethel quietly.

"Oh, were you?" I said; and I felt tears coming into my eyes. "I dare say you found plenty of hard things to say about me."

"That is hardly a generous supposition," said Ethel. "Would you like to know what conclusion we really did come to?"

'I lifted my head, and looked Ethel in the face.

"I can guess," I said. "I know the truth. I know that when I first came home, I was full of self, and did not honour my Master."

'Ethel's hand came softly on mine, pressing it.

"Haye and I were right in our conclusion," she said softly. "Hear me out, Annis. We talked over what you were, and we certainly did smile, if not laugh, over some of your ways at that time. Some were a little absurd, and some rather weak, and the religious phraseology you picked up from Isabel and her worthy circle of excellent friends was disagreeable. Also you seemed to think some

things your duty which we should not have thought so; and other things counted by most people to be your duties were left undone. But—don't interrupt me yet—but, dear, there was something else which we both felt, though we never said it to one another till now. You may have made mistakes, and done unwise things, and teased us or made us laugh—but both he and I secretly knew, as time went on, that you were at least no hypocrite—that you had something in your life which we had not. We admired you for your fearlessness in standing apart as a real Christian, even though we saw you did not always do it in the wisest and most Christlike way. And, Annis, Haye and I confessed to one another that often in our heart of hearts we have wished that that *something* which is yours had been ours too, so that life could never be unhappy or death terrible. I have thought all this over often—often—through my illness, and, strange to say, I find that Haye has often felt the same. Do you mind my saying all this?"

'She might have thought I minded it, for I was crying as I have not cried for many weeks, and she drew my face down to give me a kiss. Ethel's ways have grown so much more caressing than of old.



“Have I hurt you?” she asked.

“O no, no,” I said. “I am only so glad that God has let me in any way be His witness. I was afraid it had been all failure—almost all.”

“I don’t know how it might have been if you had gone on till now as you did just at first,” she said. “There has been a change, and you know it.”

‘I believe I knew what she meant. We did not say much more then: but when she had gone to bed, and the room was nearly dark, I asked her in a low voice, “Ethel, you say you have often wished for that something which I have. Is it yours now?”’

“I am not sure,” she said. “What is the something?”

“I think it is simply having Christ,” I said—  
“having Him for Saviour and Friend.”

‘Ethel lay silently for a minute.

“And one cannot have Him without repentance and forgiveness first, and without loving and serving Him.”

“No, I see that,” Ethel said. “Annis, I am quite sure of one thing, and that is, that Christ loves me.”

‘I did not venture to carry on a longer conversa-

tion, for fear of exciting her and preventing sleep. But it does seem to me that Ethel's face is turned heavenward. Sometimes lately I have felt that such persistent patience and cheerfulness and self-forgetfulness could not be *only* the result of natural temperament. Now I am sure that it is not so.

*' September 16th, Tuesday.*

' Here we are at home again, and indeed here we have been for three days past. Ethel has borne the journey well, and the home-folks have given us a warm welcome.

' Haye Digby is leaving for a time, but he does not return to India until late in the spring, and he hopes to spend three or four months with us before then.

' To-morrow we expect Nina and her husband for ten days on their way home. They have had quite a long foreign tour. It is Giles' first holiday of any length for two years, however; so he had fairly earned it.

*' September 24th, Wednesday.*

' Nina and Giles have been here nearly a week. It seems very natural—I am surprised to feel *how* natural—to see them as husband and wife. She makes a very pretty bride, and he is a devoted

husband. They have all kinds of plans for work together at Collins Mead.

‘I am trying hard to be unselfish, and to feel pleasure in the thought of her happiness. That trip abroad has been a great help to me : I seem to have got so many new ideas in my head. I think I am less inclined to brood over everything connected with self. Travelling, I am sure, widens one’s mind, and nursing and thinking for another does nobody any harm.

‘How very unlike in character are Giles and Haye ! I have caught myself comparing them once or twice, and laughed at myself for it.

‘Well, I sometimes think——

*‘April 9th, Thursday.*

‘My journal has lain untouched for months, with that unfinished thought, which now I suppose I shall never recall.

‘The winter has passed cheerfully, with plenty to do and plenty to think about. Papa delights in having all his girls about him again except one, his only regret being for that one.

‘Ethel was very ill about Christmas-time, and kept us in great anxiety. Since then she has been decidedly stronger, though not allowed to exert

herself. She and Con seem to have changed places. I should like to get both of them to Wildbad this summer.

‘I have ample time for East End work ; since Con took up housekeeping while I was at Paris, and has retained it. But I hope I have learnt a little more than I once knew about the right balancing of duties—duties here and duties there. I love my work among the poor more than ever ; but it is sweet to feel that whatever one does—whether it be teaching or helping those in need, or working, or housekeeping, or being agreeable in society, or bearing illness—*whatever* one does, it may be done to Christ—done in the name of Jesus. I don’t think it so much matters then what kind of duty we have to do. What does matter, is the question whether we are undertaking what God means us to undertake. I should like always to be sure of that, and then to spare no pains in doing it thoroughly for Christ’s sake. That is surely one way, and the best way, of showing our love to Him.

‘*April 16th, Thursday.*

‘Haye Digby is coming again for a short visit. He has obtained three months’ extension of leave—on what grounds I do not know—and talks of perhaps spending the time in Scotland.

‘How pleased he will be to see Ethel looking better, with some of her old colour again! I was so sorry for him in the winter through her illness. Certainly he showed self-command; but he must have felt terribly anxious if things are as I fancy.

‘I don’t think I can be mistaken. His cool manner and Ethel’s cheerfulness make them more difficult to read than most people; but she often talks of Haye to me, and seems to enjoy doing so. I indulge her, of course, and indeed I do not dislike it. She tells me little things about his kind-heartedness and liberality which I never knew before, for it is not his way to talk about his own doings. My old dislike has changed to genuine liking and esteem. I said so one day to Ethel, and she answered, “I am *very* glad,” and looked delighted. I said “Why? What does it matter?” And all she replied was, “I like everyone to be appreciated.”

‘*April 30th, Thursday.*

‘Haye Digby has been, and is gone again; and oh! it is not Ethel, it is *me*. I feel so unhappy, so sorrowful: for I have had to make Haye unhappy, and others are distressed for him.

‘Everybody saw it except myself—I who used to imagine I was so quick at reading others’ feel-

ings. He has liked me all along, from the very day when he saved me from danger in the crowded road—all the while that I used to worry him with my ways. He liked me even then : only he did not think we should suit one another : and he was sure I would not have had him, for he knew my opinion of him.

‘He felt so *then*, but lately he has felt differently. Now he thinks with me much more closely than of old ; and though he says frankly, with real humility, that he does not pretend to be an advanced Christian, still his earnest wish is to serve God.

‘He had hopes—partly because I was kinder in manner, partly because Ethel did not despair for him. He knew it was asking a great deal, to ask me to leave my *two* homes, and to go out to India. But if I loved him—or ever could love him——

‘I could not stop him till he had said his say, for he would not hear me. And then all I could say was “No.” I was not able to explain. I knew that I liked him very much—but—it is impossible.

‘He was very very much disappointed and grieved. I cannot bear now to think of his face. He has gone, and probably we shall not see him again till just at last before he starts.

*' May 13th, Wednesday.*

'I find it difficult to get through my round of all that has to be done. I am unsettled, unhappy, without knowing why. Mamma watches me quietly, and sometimes asks me if I am well: but I have no complaint to make—only the interest has gone out of everything, and I cannot tell her that. She would not understand—any more than I do myself.

'I do hope I am not giving way to a discontented spirit; but I am trying to keep up a cheerful look.

*' May 16th, Saturday.*

'Ethel taxed me to-day with feeling unhappy, and asked the reason—very kindly, but a little abruptly. I said, "Anyone may feel unhappy at having to make another so." She said, "How do you know Haye cares still?" I looked up with quite an indignant exclamation, and then she laughed, and said, "Why should you expect him not to console himself? Confess—confess, Annis,—you would not be pleased if he did."

'I said, "I do not wish him to go on being unhappy."

"In the abstract, no. In the particular, yes. Annis"—and she took hold of both my hands—"are you perfectly sure that you know your own mind?"

‘I thought of what I felt a few months ago about—about somebody else, and said, “Yes.”

“Would you be happy never to see Hays again?”

‘I don’t know how it was, but I found myself suddenly in tears, murmuring something about his’ having spoken in “such a hurry.”

“I see—I understand,” said Ethel, kissing me. ‘That is not what *I* call a hurry, but——”

“Ethel, I have said nothing—you must say nothing!” I exclaimed.

“Nothing to nobody,” said Ethel gaily. “Mayn’t I even suggest to the poor fellow, pining away in a lonesome Highland cottage, that he may as well spend a few weeks here before he goes out, after all?”

‘I said “No” decidedly. But somehow, when Ethel had talked with me a long while, and Mamma had talked with me, and I had been made to cry and laugh and think—somehow I did feel, and do feel, that if Hays went out to India without my seeing him again, I should feel very miserable.

‘Am I fickle? Oh, I hope not. But the *other* is crushed—dead—gone. I am changed as to that. And this——

‘That a heart is often caught at the rebound, people are fond of saying. Is there weakness or



shame in its being so? I rather think I ought to be glad that it has been—can be so.

*' May 19th, Tuesday.*

' Haye did not write in answer to Ethel's letter. He came straight here, fast as express trains could bring him.

' Ethel told him he had been too hasty; so he did not mean to say a word to me yet awhile. But I happened to be alone in the drawing-room when he arrived. He just walked straight in, and took my hand. And I think I knew what I felt at that moment more clearly than before, and perhaps he saw it.

' I am not sure about that. I only know that when Mamma came in, ten minutes later, it was settled.

*' May 20th, Wednesday.*

' I am very happy and very thankful.

' Only to think—if Ethel had never been ill, and if I had never gone to Paris, and so learnt to know Haye's true character!

' The wedding is to take place in two months. There was talk at first of delay, and of his returning for me in a year or so. But all that is given up now.

' The house at Collins Mead is let for seven years, but I have arranged that every summer

Mamma and Papa and my sisters are to have the use of it for two months, while my tenants are away. If we come home by-and-by, we shall need it ourselves—but no need to look ahead so far.

‘The Wildbad visit is put off until after my wedding. I have been able to make Papa a little present which will take them all five there, and give them a good six weeks abroad. Haye quite concurs with me in all these plans.

*‘July 16th.*

‘To-morrow, please God, will be my wedding-day. This is the last entry, I trust, of Annis Dermot.

‘I am tired and excited, and cannot write much. But I should like just to record my thankfulness for guidance and training past.

‘I feel now how good it was that I did not remain at Collins Mead after Auntie’s death. It is very wonderful to look back, and to see how plainly God’s gifts and denials and teachings have all been exactly what I needed.

‘Yes, now I see. But why did I not see at the time—or if I could not see, why did I not believe?

‘I will try for the future.

‘Haye and I often talk over these things. He tells me he has much to learn from me. But I tell

him he has much to teach me. For his character is so different from mine—so thorough and sensible, so free from littlenesses.

‘I must not begin upon that subject, however, or I shall not be in bed before midnight.

‘Fanny and her mother are both here. I said this afternoon to Mrs. Wayatt, “I have always pictured to myself a very different life from what lies before me.”

‘“How do you know what lies before you?” she asked quietly.

‘“Why, Mrs. Wayatt!” I said.

‘“Well, you know the next step seemingly,” she said, with a smile. “It is the most we ever do know, my dear; and I would not try to look farther.”

‘“Still one does plan for one’s self sometimes,” I said. “And it is curious to see how different the reality turns out from my plannings.”

‘“So long as your life is according to God’s planning, it doesn’t much matter about your own,” she answered. How like Mrs. Wayatt!

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